

Certain Victory



Topic

Christ's Resurrection

Theme

Christ's resurrection guarantees believers a glorious resurrection and provides a reason for team church to work together for the Lord.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will understand that Christ's resurrection should affect the way he lives for God.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 15

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 15

Summary

Paul covers the resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15. Christ's resurrection is foundational to our hope as believers. Because of this glorious hope of the resurrection, believers ought to stand fast in the faith and should abound in God's work.

Outline

- I. Christ's Resurrection Is Real (15:1–11)
 - A. Christ's resurrection is Scriptural (15:1–4)
 - B. Christ's resurrection is substantiated (15:5–11)
- II. Christ's Resurrection Gives Hope (15:12–57)
 - A. Emptiness of an occupied tomb (15:12–19)
 - B. Fullness of an unoccupied tomb (15:20–57)
- III. Christ's Resurrection Encourages Diligence (15:58)
 - A. A steadfast perseverance
 - B. A sure promise

Memory Verse

*"But now is Christ risen from the dead,
and become the firstfruits of them that slept"
(1 Corinthians 15:20).*

GETTING STARTED

That's Preposterous!

Read the following facts and ask your class if they think the claims are legitimate or preposterous.

1. The total weight of all the ants in the world is more than the total weight of all the people.
2. A cockroach can survive without its head for nearly a week.
3. The average hummingbird's heart rate is more than 1,200 beats per minute.

All the above facts are true. Note that the cockroach breathes through its body. It would eventually die of dehydration, not suffocation, without its head.

ASK: Was there ever a time in your life when you thought Christ's resurrection was preposterous? (Q1)

ASK: What gives you assurance that Christ's resurrection is real? (Q2)

Christ's resurrection seems preposterous when only natural laws are considered. Some in the church at Corinth believed resurrection wasn't even desirable. Paul wrote to address their error and to share the beneficial effects of Christ's resurrection for members of team church.

Of Utmost Importance

Religious leaders hold many different views about the nature and importance of the resurrection of Christ.

ASK: Can a church deny the physical resurrection of Christ and still be a gospel-preaching church? Explain. *No. Without the physical resurrection of Christ there would be no gospel.*

ASK: Can a person deny the physical resurrection of Christ and still be a Christian? *No. He would be in denial of the deity of Christ, the justification of the believer, and the believer's own bodily resurrection.*

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15 to emphasize Christ's resurrection and its importance for believers of all time.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Christ's Resurrection Is Real (15:1–11)

Paul had learned that some in the church at Corinth denied the resurrection of the dead, although they believed in Christ's resurrection (15:12). Since the resurrection of the dead is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection, Paul wrote at length about its reality and about its impact on Christian living.

A. Christ's resurrection is Scriptural (15:1–4)

The gospel Paul preached to the Corinthians was pregnant with saving power because it was Scriptural (15:1, 2). Paul reminded the Corinthians of the gospel message. He said 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* (15:3, 4). In other words, Christ rose from the dead physically, not merely spiritually, and within history, not as mythology. All the events surrounding His crucifixion and resurrection were completely grounded in Scripture.

READ: Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Mark 15:25–37. **ASK:** How substantiated is the death of Christ in Scripture? (Q3) *It is presented at length prophetically (before it happened), historically (after it happened) and doctrinally as to its significance.*

READ: Psalm 16:10; John 20:1–19. **ASK:** How substantiated is the resurrection of Christ in Scripture? (Q4) *Scriptures leave no doubt that Christ would and then did raise from the dead.*

READ: Romans 4:25. **ASK:** Paul linked justification to Christ's resurrection. How important is the doctrine of justification? (Q5) *It is the entire basis of our relationship with God through the gospel.*

B. Christ's resurrection is substantiated (15:5–11)

In defense of the resurrection, Paul summoned a host of eyewitnesses to the witness stand. Cephas (Peter) saw the risen Christ. Then all the Twelve saw Him (15:5). Later, more than 500 believers saw Him. Then He was seen by James, Jesus' half-brother. Next, Paul mentioned the entire group of the apostles again as having seen the risen Christ (15:7). Finally, Paul recounted that he saw the risen Christ (15:8). This personal reference recalls Paul's Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:1–9).

ASK: Why are eyewitnesses crucial in deciding a court case? (Q6) *They verify the facts of the situation and the truthfulness of the accounts offered.*

ASK: How important are the witnesses of the resurrection? (Q7) *Scripture includes their testimony to teach us that the resurrection was a real, historical event and to give us details we must understand. We ultimately believe the resurrection of Christ happened because God has revealed the truth about it in His Word.*

How do we have confidence in the reality of Christ's resurrection and base our hope of eternal life upon it? The answer is that we ultimately do so by faith in response to the work of the Holy Spirit, Who uses the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). We must trust in the work of Christ as our only hope of salvation. This is possible through God's gracious work in calling us to Himself (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24); it is not merely the natural outcome of being convinced of the historical fact of the resurrection (cf. 2:14).

In this manner, the saving grace of the risen Son of God had transformed the author of this chapter, Paul, from a lost, spiritually-blind Pharisee to a found and forgiven person in possession of new life and a new ambition. Thus, from the time

of his conversion and call to preach the gospel, Paul humbly and devotedly proclaimed the good news about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (15:9–11).

II. Christ's Resurrection Gives Hope (15:12–57)

No one can remove the doctrine of the resurrection from the Bible without also removing hope from the human heart. Apart from the resurrection, there is no hope of living eternally in Heaven or triumphantly on earth.

A. Emptiness of an occupied tomb (15:12–19)

The resurrection of Christ makes the believer's resurrection possible (cf. John 14:19). More than that, in God's plan, it makes the believer's resurrection an absolute certainty (1 Cor. 15:12). Conversely, Paul argued that if we cannot look forward to our resurrection, we must logically look backward to a tomb that still contains the body of the crucified Christ (15:13).

Here again, the Corinthians showed signs of the lingering influence of Greek philosophy, which degraded the body. Apparently, some Corinthians believers did not understand that the body will be necessary to fully enjoy a glorified existence in Heaven.

Paul took the occasion of the Corinthians' confusion about the nature of the resurrection body to write this lengthy doctrinal treatise. It constitutes the major passage in the New Testament on the topic of the resurrection. The treatise not only supplies us with much information, but also brings immeasurable comfort to believers.

Paul reveals that a dead Christ would force us to regard our preaching as simply a vain exercise and our faith as a groundless superstition (15:14). Furthermore, a tomb occupied by Christ's dead body declares every Christian witness a liar and pronounces every Christian lost in sin (15:15–17). To make matters worse, if Christ did not overcome death then all our departed Christian friends and family members have entered a doomed eternity (15:18). The lives of Christian servants would be less than meaningless if Christ's body were still lying in the tomb (15:19).

ASK: What thoughts would go through your mind if you learned the resurrection of Christ was just a hoax? (Q8)

ASK: Take a moment to praise God for the confidence we have in the resurrection. (Q9)

B. Fullness of an unoccupied tomb (15:20–57)

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:20–23. **ASK:** How does this passage link Christ's resurrection to the resurrection of believers? (Q10) *The resurrection of believers is made possible only by Christ first conquering death and making a way to new life.*

Christ's resurrection may be considered the *firstfruits* in at least three ways: (1) His resurrection was the first of its kind—being raised in glorification never to die again (cf. Acts 26:23); (2) His resurrection was the first in priority and position (Col. 1:18); and (3) His resurrection was the first of more to come (John 14:19; 1 Cor. 15:23).

Paul assured the Corinthians that Christ is risen from the dead. There is a valid gospel to proclaim, for Christ truly rose, and we can aspire to rise as well. There is hope of life beyond the grave, the prospect of reunion with departed Christian loved ones, and a reason to endure persecution. Drawing from Leviticus 23:10, Paul exclaimed that Christ has *become the firstfruits of them that slept* (1 Cor. 15:20). As death came to all by Adam, so life came to all who are in Christ (15:21).

Notice here that Paul assumed and built upon the historicity of Adam as the first man and the one, along with Eve, who first sinned. If this is not the case, as some who deny the literal truth of the creation account in Genesis teach, the passage in which Paul is tightly framing his arguments according to history and logic would be meaningless.

The result of Christ's work will be to restore humanity to a pre-Fall state (cf. Matt. 19:28) in a world without sin (Gen. 1; 2). Those who deny the literal account of creation in Genesis and teach that there were countless years of death and destruction before the appearance of man and woman claim to crush hope of a glorious future in Christ.

READ: 1 Peter 1:3. **ASK:** What has the resurrection of Christ produced in believers? (Q11) *A hope that is alive.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 15. **ASK:** How is this hope demonstrated in daily living? (Q12) (Reveal or record answers.) *We have hope during trials, hope of a better future in Heaven, hope of being reunited with loved ones, and the hope of experiencing God's sufficient grace always.*

The order of the resurrection and other future events appears in verses 23–28. Paul included the hope of resurrection for Christians *at his coming* (15:23), as well as the resurrection and judgment of unbelievers that will occur following the Millennium (15:25, 26; cf. Rev. 20:5, 6).

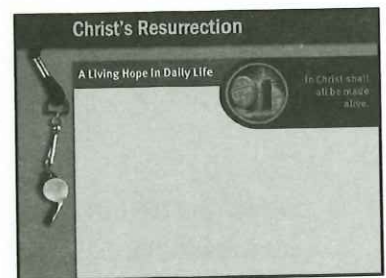
The culmination of these future events is the rule of God the Father over all in the eternal kingdom, which will exceed even the glory of the millennial Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24, 27, 28). The resurrection of Christ makes the future, eternal, glorious reign of God possible in this manner.

Christ's resurrection also made baptism meaningful. Paul viewed the ranks of Christians as soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare. As some Christian soldiers died, others stepped in to fill the void. In baptism, these new believers confessed their faith in the risen Christ and their allegiance to Him (15:29).

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:31–33. **ASK:** What was Paul willing to do because he knew Christ was raised? (Q13) *Paul was willing to put his life on the line and to deny himself.*

TESTIMONY: When have you witnessed someone with the same sacrificial, bold assurance of Christ's resurrection? (Q14)

The resurrection of Christ made Paul's perilous life worthwhile. He faced death daily for the sake of the gospel, having turned his back on the allurements of a soft



Interpreting verse 29 is problematic. The explanation offered here is probably the simplest one for it.

and comfortable life (15:30–32). His reference to fighting wild beasts at Ephesus may be to the wild public demonstration that opposed him when he preached there (Acts 19:23–20:1). Sometimes human foes of the gospel can act like vicious animals.

In verses 33 and 34, Paul called upon the Corinthian believers to turn away from false teachers who denied the resurrection. What they believed about the resurrection would determine how they lived. False teaching would produce false and ungodly living.

Anticipating questions about the resurrection, Paul provided helpful answers. *How are the dead raised up?* was the first question Paul addressed (15:35). He drew upon a principle of nature in doing so. He explained that death always precedes life when a seed is sown (15:36, 37).

Next, Paul answered the anticipated question about what the resurrected body will be like. He explained that there are different kinds of flesh: human, animal, fish, and bird flesh (15:39). Then he pointed out the astronomical and earthly kinds of bodies in the universe. He noted each has a distinct glory (15:40, 41). And since God has created such a glorious diversity in the universe, He can be trusted to provide glorious resurrection bodies for His people. At the resurrection, a believer's dead body will come out of the grave in a glorified state. It will no longer experience the corruption it underwent in the grave; it will be incorruptible forever (15:42, 43). It will be a *spiritual body* that is fit for use in eternity (15:44).

Drawing from Biblical history, Paul told the Corinthians that Adam became the head of the natural human race. Since the Fall, his sinful tendencies and wicked appetites characterize his descendants. Adam's sin became our sin. Then came the *last Adam* (15:45), Christ. All who trust in Christ become a new spiritual race under Christ's headship. The natural preceded the spiritual for all of us believers.

So in the resurrection the change is from the lower, natural order to the higher, spiritual order. Now each of us has a natural body, but in the resurrection, each of us will have a spiritual body like Christ has had since His resurrection (15:45–49; cf. Luke 24:13–43; John 20:14–20; Phil. 3:20, 21). Though glorified, each of us will be the exact same person that he or she is now.

ASK: What aspects of a glorified body are you looking forward to enjoying the most? (Q15)

When will Christians receive new, glorified, spiritual bodies and *inherit the kingdom of God* (15:50)? Paul associated the time with the Rapture. He presented this truth as a new disclosure, *a mystery* (15:51a). Christians alive on the earth when Christ returns to rapture the church will not experience death but will undergo a dramatic transformation (15:51b).

Instantaneously at Christ's command, the bodies of dead Christians will arise and become incapable of decaying ever again, and the bodies of living Christians will be changed to become incapable of dying (15:52, 53; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Regarding *the last trump* in 15:52, Roman soldiers were accustomed to hearing three trumpet signals. The first summoned them to break camp; the second, to fall into line for the march; and the third, to march away. At the Rapture, we will break camp with this life, join resurrected Christians, and depart from the earth to be with Christ in Heaven.

Revelation 1:10–18 gives a description of Christ in His heavenly glory. As mere humans, we will not possess the attributes of deity that He displays there, but we will have glorified bodies with capabilities like what He had for the 40 days following His resurrection (cf. Acts 1:1–3).

The doctrine of the resurrection is inextricably linked with the doctrine of the Second Coming. To return, Jesus had to rise from the dead; since He did, He must return (cf. John 14:3).

Because the resurrection of Christ assures our resurrection, we need not fear death. When we are resurrected, we will leave death behind as our last unsuccessful foe (15:54). From our perspective, death is like a defanged snake and the grave resembles a prison with its doors removed (15:55). Christ removed the sting of death by dying for us and by rising again. He removed sin's sentence from us and fulfilled the law's demand on our behalf (15:56). Our response is one of thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ for procuring the victory over sin and death for us (15:57). Indeed, we enjoy a full and bright hope because Jesus arose from the grave.

III. Christ's Resurrection Encourages Diligence (15:58)

As usual in Scripture, a discussion of the Rapture leads to an appeal for active Christian service. In concluding his teaching about the resurrection, Paul encouraged his readers to maintain a steadfast perseverance.

A. A steadfast perseverance (15:58a)

The Corinthian believers needed to function as a team that was headed for ultimate victory. It was time they put aside their petty differences and joined together in faithful Christian service. They had a big job ahead of them. According to verse 58, the job required being *stedfast* (having a fixed goal), *unmoveable* (unswerving from the faith), and *always abounding in the work of the Lord* (remaining diligent in ministry).

ASK: What are some good reasons for working for the Lord in the manner described in verse 58? (Q16) *All acceptable works done with appropriate motives will be rewarded, thus we are extending the usefulness of our lives into eternity when we serve the Lord.*

B. A sure promise (15:58b)

Paul assured the Corinthians their *labour is not in vain in the Lord* (15:58b). Neither is ours. He will honor dedicated Christian teamwork now by helping us fulfill His will. By His power, we will make an impact on our community and even upon the world. Then, when we see Him face to face, He will reward us.

In professional sports, a team may give its all to win the Stanley Cup, the Vince Lombardi trophy, or the Larry O'Brien NBA Championship trophy, but none of those trophies—or any other—could compare with the eternal reward that Christ will confer on faithful workers at the Rapture. Let's keep our eyes on that goal!

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Daily Life in Christ

Paul's life demonstrated the power of Christ's resurrection. He trusted in that power to achieve his many accomplishments and endure his many trials (cf. Gal. 2:20). The same power is available to every believer today. We must simply appropriate it by faith.

ASK: What aspects of your daily life reflect your union with the risen Christ? (Q17)

ASK: What areas need your attention? (Q18)

Encourage the learners to ask Christ to empower them for service and daily living by His Holy Spirit, through His Word. (Q19)

Rekindled Zeal

The final verse in this great chapter is one of the most motivating texts in all of Scripture. It contains both emboldening imperatives and enlightening promises. If you are discouraged by circumstances, whether large or small, let this verse lift you above the monotony of life by means of consideration of the glory that will be ours through our resurrected Lord. Refocus your priorities and efforts around Him and His plan for you.

ASK: Do you sometimes feel ready to quit your involvement in Christian service? Why? (Q20)

Let the fact that Christ is alive rekindle your zeal. Our *labour is not in vain in the Lord* (1 Cor. 15:58).

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Live in the hope of Christ's resurrection.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 15:20. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

