

Understanding the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NIV)

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also...

We understand the death of Jesus was necessary to pay the death price for our sinful actions, but why was the resurrection of Jesus so essential?

In the Corinthian church some were arguing that there was no physical resurrection of believers. Paul responded by arguing that if there is no resurrection of believers, then even Jesus was not raised. He argued that the resurrection of Jesus prepared the way for us to be physically raised with new bodies as well.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NIV)

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost [perish]. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

In this passage, what are all the implications for us if Jesus was not raised from the dead? In each case discuss your thoughts as to why this is significant?

- 1) vs.14 **The Apostles' preaching is useless**

Why?

The Apostles' teachings were based on the fact that Jesus died, conquered death and as a result, rose to new life. If this foundational teaching was not true, then all their other teachings would crumble. Every hope they proclaimed would be nothing more than empty promises.

- 2) vs.14 **Your faith is useless**

Why?

If Jesus died and stayed dead, then he was defeated by death. If he is dead, he is dead. Yet, Christ's whole mission was to come to give us life eternal. It is true that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross would have paid the penalty for our sin, but apart from the

resurrection, there would be no way to free us from the grip of death. Our sinful bodies took us to the grave; we need new bodies in order to rise to new life. We were never designed to live solely as spirits since that would fall short of God's perfect design for humanity.

3) vs.15 **The Apostles are false witnesses**
Why?

The Apostles proclaimed that they were eye witnesses to the physically resurrected Jesus. They claimed, as did 500 other people, to have seen him, touched him and eaten with him. If Jesus was not resurrected, then they are blatant liars and deceivers. If that is the case, then nothing they taught should be believed and the very Corinthian church that they are writing to should not exist. It is all a lie.

4) vs.17 **Your faith is futile, you are still in your sins**
Why?

Our hope is based on the fact that the risen Jesus sends his Spirit to indwell us, applying his death and righteousness to our lives. If Jesus is still in the grave then he is simply a martyr at best and cannot send his Spirit to cleanse us and give us eternal life. He himself is still trapped by the grave for the consequences of our sin. If this is true, then there is no way to receive forgiveness, and faith in Jesus cannot accomplish anything for us in this life or in eternity.

5) vs.18 **Those who have died are lost**
Why?

If Christ has not risen then those who died in the past are still trapped in their sin and there can be no hope for them. They are trapped in the judgment of death.

6) vs 19 **We are to be pitied more than all men**
Why?

If Jesus is not raised, then we have no hope for an eternal future with God at all. This means that we have focused our faith on a hope that does not exist; that we have aligned ourselves with a belief system that is a lie and that all we can look forward to is judgment. There is no future hope, no present hope and no hope for those who have died.

Through the indwelling of the Spirit of the resurrected Christ our standing with God changes in several ways. Discuss each theological term and what you think it means.

1) Propitiation

1 John 4:10 (NASB)

*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.*

What does propitiation mean?

Propitiation means **the anger of God has been removed** through the death of Jesus Christ. God's righteous anger toward us was placed on Jesus on the cross. This implies that if we are apart from Christ we will receive the full extent of God's wrath against our sin.

2) Justification:

Romans 5:18 (NIV)

*Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was **justification** that brings life for all men.*

What does justification mean?

Justification means we are **declared righteous** before God. This is possible as the death penalty for our sins is paid by Jesus Christ and his righteousness is placed on our lives as a gift. We, the guilty, are pardoned by the judge and are now declared Not-Guilty.

3) Sanctification:

1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)

*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were **sanctified**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (NIV)

*It is God's will that you should be **sanctified**: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;*

What does sanctification mean?

We are set free from bondage to sin and **set apart to God**.

Two expressions of sanctification:

- a) We are sanctified and declared holy at the **point of salvation**
We are washed clean, declared his people, his family and are called saints, or holy ones.
- b) But there is also a sense in which sanctification is an **ongoing process** as we continue to battle the old nature and increasingly live out the holy life.

4) **Regeneration:**

Titus 3:5 (NASB)

*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit,*

What does regeneration mean?

We are changed and made new

At the point of salvation (the time of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) we are given a new, holy nature immediately. However, the Holy Spirit does not stop there. He continues to renew our minds, which is progressive sanctification. Eventually he will renew our bodies at the return of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

The above terms are dependent on both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 (NIV)

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

What does it mean when Paul says Jesus is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"?

The "firstfruits" were the first produce reaped at harvest time. It was the hopeful time when all farmers looked forward to the rest of the crop soon to come. The firstfruits became a prophetic symbol looking forward to the time when they would arrive in the Promised Land and receive the rest of the fulfillment of God's promise.

Paul was indicating that Jesus' resurrection was the first of an abundant harvest of resurrected people who would spend eternity with God in the Promised Land, what we refer to as heaven or the new earth.

What do you think our new bodies will be like at the resurrection?

Some feel they will be whatever they want to be. One youth commented on the fact that she wanted to be a mermaid in heaven. **How would you respond to this perspective?**

What was Jesus' resurrected body like?

- It was physical and could be touched
- Jesus ate with the disciples
- Jesus could suddenly appear in a locked room
- Jesus was recognizable – though at times not to all people.

1 Corinthians 15:35-44 (NIV)

But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.³⁹ All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

⁴² *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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 natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

What are some advantages of this new body?

The new body:

- 1) It will be raised **imperishable**
The new body will not be able to become sick, age or die.
- 2) It will be raised **in glory**
Glory in this sense means the opposite of dishonor, shame or humiliation. It looks forward to victory, honour and being raised to sit on a throne with Christ.
- 3) It will be raised **in power**
The new body will be raised through God's awesome power and will display the power Christ exhibited while on earth, and more.
- 4) It will be raised **spiritual**
This does not mean the new body won't be physical. It means it will be holy and in complete alignment with the Spirit of God. Man was always meant to live in the physical realm while at the same time in touch with the spiritual realm. Mankind, as the image of God, is the connecting point between the physical world and the spiritual realm.

When and how do you think this will all take place?

Teacher's Note: The goal of this study is not to get into a debate about Pre/Mid/Post-Tribulation rapture perspectives, but merely to show the elements that must take place to complete our resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (NIV)

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

(Sometimes vs. 51 is placed above church nursery doors. ☺)

What is the significance of the trumpet call?

Israel celebrated seven, God ordained feasts: four in the spring, three in the fall. Each feast had a special spiritual focus which ultimately had its fulfillment in Christ.

The Fall feasts were all held in the seventh month (Tishri) and are described in Leviticus 23. One specific feast is very relevant to our discussion.

The Day of Blowing or Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)

Leviticus 23:23-25 (NIV)

The Lord said to Moses, ²⁴ "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. ²⁵ Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the Lord by fire.'"

- This day was a solemn assembly to reflect on your sin and repent in preparation for the Day of Atonement (10 days later) when God would exercise his judgement and wrath against sin.
- It was a call to spiritual renewal.

- It was understood that on this day books would be opened in heaven and people were held accountable for their standing before God; the wicked would be separated from the righteous.
- It was also a time of looking forward to the reign of God among his people.

In what ways is the return of Christ similar to the Feast of Trumpets?

At Christ's return:

- God separates the righteous from the wicked.
- The actual judgement will come later
- The trumpet blast announces the arrival and initiation of this time.
- It is a time when the judge of the world is revealed
- It is a time of ultimate renewal for the faithful
- It is a solemn time for the sinner

Joel 2:1 (NIV)

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand--

Revelation 11:15 (NIV)

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

If we know we are going to be resurrected, given new glorious bodies and reign with Christ, how should that affect our lives in the present?

The following passages are directly related to the message of the hope of Jesus' return and our resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NIV)

Therefore encourage each other with these words.

How might the hope of the resurrection be an encouragement to us in the present?

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

Therefore [in light of the resurrection], my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

How might the hope of the resurrection help us to stand firm?

How might the hope of the resurrection motivate us to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord?

What is the most exciting thing to you about the resurrection?

What may be a disconcerting reality about the hope of the resurrection?

The most disconcerting reality of the resurrection may be the reality that some people we deeply care about will not be a part of it. They will miss out on forgiveness and be left to judgement.

Some were concerned that they missed the return of Christ. Paul responds to that concern in 2Thessalonians 2 by providing more insight as to the coming chain of events. Read this on your own for deeper insight.