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**I**n the final two chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul must confront one last problem and raise one important issue. The problem he now confronts is perhaps the worst within the Corinthian church. Sure, the divisions were serious. The abuse of the Lord’s Supper couldn’t be overlooked. And the immorality had to be corrected. But all of these paled compared to the realization that there were some “Christians” at Corinth denying the resurrection.

One has to wonder what remains of Christianity when there is no belief in a resurrection. As Paul wrote: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (vv. 13–14). If there is no resurrection, then why bother with the Church? What’s the point?

It’s interesting to see the close connection Paul makes between Christ’s resurrection and our own. Paul suggests that if we discard a belief in our own resurrection, then we deny the reality of Christ’s resurrection (vv. 12–15). And if we deny Christ’s resurrection, we find ourselves with insurmountable problems. For one thing, if Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then Paul and all the apostles are nothing but false prophets. They are lying. And all their work, the persecution they’ve endured, the problems they’ve faced, has been in vain. If Christ did not rise from the dead, faith is futile. Our trust in the Lord is a fairy tale. This also means that our sins are not forgiven and all the ways we’ve hurt our friends and neighbors are forever part of our lives. Can you imagine a world without forgiveness? Finally, and saddest of all, if Christ did not rise from the dead, then our deceased loved ones will never know life again.

Fortunately, Christ rose from the dead to give us the gift of eternal life. For Paul, the proof of His resurrection could be found in personal witness. The apostles were eye witnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Christ did indeed die on the cross just as Scripture predicted. He was buried and then raised on the third day. And to prove the reality of His resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to a number of different people at different times so that no one could claim His post-resurrection appearance was the result of an individual's hallucination or the consequence of mass hysteria. Jesus appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve apostles. Then 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." Now, we have no other record of this appearance. Perhaps Paul is referring to Jesus' ascension. In any case, many of those present at that amazing appearance were still alive when Paul wrote. They would be excellent supporting witnesses to Paul's claim.

After Jesus appeared to the five hundred, He also revealed Himself to James, then to all the apostles, and finally to Paul. Paul says "he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born" to stress that he was not one of the original twelve. His entry into the group of apostles was not "normal." It happened to him dramatically on the road to Damascus in blinding light and with the thundering voice of the Lord. Furthermore, at his conversion, Paul was suddenly transformed from his former life to a new life. So the term "abnormally born" is very descriptive of Paul's call to apostleship.

Despite being an apostle of the Lord, Paul frequently demonstrates his humility within

his letters. In 15:9–11 he admits his many failings, particularly in his former life when he persecuted Christians. But he is grateful for the amazing grace demonstrated by the Lord in calling him to be an apostle despite his shameful past. In gratitude for that grace, Paul says he has worked harder than any of the other apostles. That's still no reason to brag. The ability and strength to work hard is also given by the grace of God.

Christ has been raised from the dead as a model of the resurrection awaiting all believers. Paul makes this interesting parallel: just as sin and death were brought into the world through the man, Adam, so forgiveness and salvation will come to us through the man, Jesus. Now, technically, sin began through Eve's disobedience. Paul knows this of course. When he speaks of the prohibition against women publicly prophesying, he points to the fact that Eve sinned first. But for the sake of understanding and good imagery, Paul uses the two men, Adam and Jesus, to illustrate the difference between sin and grace, death and salvation.

Paul reminds his readers that when the end of time arrives and Jesus has judged the world, He will turn everything over to the Father and become subordinate to the Father's will. Now, this isn't to imply that the Son is somehow inferior to the Father. All three persons of the Trinity are equal. But their functions differ. *The Concordia Self-Study Bible* describes this relationship expertly: "The Father is supreme in the Trinity; the Son carries out the Father's will (e.g. creation, redemption); the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to vitalize life, communicate God's truth, apply his salvation to people through the means of grace

and enable them to obey God's will." The relationship between the three persons of the Trinity is not one of superiority or inferiority, but a matter of function and role.

Paul implies an interesting practice present among some of the early Christians. He says, "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?" What is he referring to? Whatever practice Paul is describing, he suggests by his use of the present tense that it is still in use. Perhaps it was another deviant practice of the Corinthians. They certainly misunderstood the use of the Lord's Supper. Why not baptism as well? Paul's words suggest that believers were being baptized on behalf of others who had already died. Perhaps these were Christians who died before being baptized.

The Mormon Church has taken this one verse out of its Scriptural context and used it to support their bizarre practice of surrogate baptisms for the dead. By this practice the Mormons hope to bring the dead into a higher kingdom in the afterlife. In any case, Paul casually mentions this practice for the purpose of supporting the reality of the resurrection. If the resurrection is not real and true, then those involved in this strange baptismal practice are wasting their time, just as Paul's suffering for the Lord would also be useless.

In an intriguing note, one of Paul's trials is mentioned in verse 32: "If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?" This sounds if Paul may have confronted devouring lions in the arena at Ephesus. However, we have no record of this incident in Paul's other writings or in the book of Acts. Maybe Paul is

just using the term "wild animals" to describe an encounter with his enemies.

In any case, Paul suggests that those who are denying the resurrection should be avoided because, as Paul quotes from the Greek comedy *Thais*, "bad company corrupts good character." Paul tells the Corinthians to return to their senses and believe in the resurrection as a vital and essential part of their faith. They must refrain from the sin of denial and unbelief.

But some of the skeptics at Corinth were asking "How are the dead raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" These are not unusual questions. I have often been asked by my parishioners what we will look like in heaven or how old we will appear. These are unnecessary questions because we know that whatever we are like, we will enjoy perfect bliss with the Lord. There is nothing more important than that.

However, Paul gives us some information about the appearance of our bodies in the world to come when he describes a seed sprouting into a plant. The seed must be buried in order for the plant to sprout. In the same way, the earthly body must be "buried" before the new and glorified body is created. When one plants a random seed, one cannot determine what the plant will look like. Only after it is fully grown can we admire what it has become, but we know it will be a glorious improvement. There are also different kinds of animal species on earth. In the same way, our bodies in heaven will be of a different "type" than on earth. There are heavenly creations like the sun, moon, and stars, as well as earthly creations like the mountains and seas. Similarly our heavenly bodies will differ from our earthly bodies, but the difference will be a vast improvement.

Our earthly bodies are perishable, weak, and dishonorable, but our heavenly bodies will be immortal, glorified and powerful. Our earthly bodies resemble Adam. But we will become like the second Adam, Jesus, who came from the heavens. While on earth, we will remain a model of the old Adam, consisting of clay and dust. When we reach our heavenly home, we will resemble the New Adam. We will be like Jesus.

The bottom line is that our flesh and blood bodies are unable to enter the kingdom of heaven. One must be recreated sinless and with glorified bodies to live with the Lord.

And then Paul gives us an interesting clue about the Second Coming of the Lord. When He comes, it will be in an instant, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. The dead will be raised and changed into that which cannot perish. And that's when the prophecy of Hosea will be fulfilled: *Death will no longer sting, nor will it enjoy victory*. Death will die. It was sin that brought us under death's power in the first place, and sin occurs with the breaking of God's Law. But because of the grace of God, death will end and we will live without sin into eternity. Consequently, we are to remain in the hope of the resurrection, letting that hope motivate us to serve God constantly. Since there truly is a resurrection, our service to the Lord is not useless. There is a reward awaiting us in God's kingdom.

There is yet one important issue to raise. For one reason or another, Paul was raising a massive collection for the Christians in Jerusalem. The churches of Galatia were involved in this collection. So was the church in Macedonia. Paul wants the affluent Corinthians involved as well. Why the need for such a huge collection? In Acts 11:28 the prophet Agabus foretells a terrible famine which would sweep through the Roman world. Perhaps the Christians in Jerusalem were still suffering

from this disaster or perhaps they were enduring persecution by the Roman government and their property and goods had been seized. So Paul encourages the Corinthians to take an offering during each Sunday's worship which Paul would take with him when he returned to Jerusalem.

In the meantime, Paul feels he must stay in Ephesus because he is enjoying great success sharing the gospel among the local citizens.

Paul will send his beloved Christian brother, Timothy, to the Corinthians. Timothy apparently feels a bit timid about going to Corinth. Paul tells the Corinthians they must accept him just as they would Paul. The Corinthians had asked about their eloquent preacher Apollos. They really wanted to see and hear him again. But Apollos found it difficult to get to Corinth, promising he would come to them later.

After exhorting the Corinthians to remain strong in their faith and do everything out of Christian love, Paul upholds one particular family called "the house of Stephanas." It is possible that although Chloe's household brought Paul the bad news about the Corinthian Christians' behavior (1:11), Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who visited with Paul in Ephesus, may have brought the letter referred to in 7:1 which asked specific questions of Paul. In any case, these three showed Paul the affection and support which the Corinthian Church as a whole was lacking.

Paul finishes his letter with some final greetings. He sends greetings from the churches in the province of Asia, which today is the area of western Turkey. He also sends greetings on behalf of Aquila and Priscilla, who had helped Paul found the Corinthian church. Aquila and Priscilla had followed Paul to Ephesus and established a house church. House churches, of

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course, were standard for the early Christians because Christianity was not officially sanctioned by the Roman government.

Paul asks the Corinthians to greet each other with a holy kiss, an act of respect and love which was a customary, public practice among the early Christians. Today we often greet one another saying: “The peace of the Lord be with you” as we shake hands. It is our contemporary version of the holy kiss.

Paul then signs the letter, writing “in my own hand,” giving authenticity to the writings. Interestingly, Paul gives a final curse to those who do not love the Lord. Then he writes, “Come, O Lord!” a common expression among the early Christians indicating their hope that the Second Coming of Christ would soon occur. The author gives a benediction and concludes by reminding them that despite his concerns about their faith, despite his admonitions, he still and always will love them.

For all the problems Paul had to confront and questions he felt impelled to answer, how impoverished we would be today were it not for the trouble at Corinth! Because of their trouble, we gain insight into the Lord’s will for many of the practical aspects of church life.

- We have learned how important unity is within the congregation.
- We have been reminded that immorality among Christian brothers and sisters must be avoided along with conflicts which turn to secular courts for resolution.
- We have learned a little bit more about the role of women within the church, and the seriousness of marriage.
- We have learned not to confuse neutral acts such as eating the meat once offered to idols with something intrinsically sinful.
- We have discovered a multitude of spiritual gifts, realizing that all such gifts must be subordinate to love.
- Finally, we have considered the importance for the Christian Church to uphold the reality of the resurrection. We would have known little of this had it not been for the troubles in Corinth.

So, we marvel at how the Lord redeemed such difficult problems with one church into something which has inspired the entire Christian Church. *God grant your congregation many spiritual gifts, sound doctrine, and the love which upholds unity and peace!*