

## PREFACE

Although it is true that we have now left behind the discussion of Spirit-gifts, and how they are to be used for the edification of all in the well-ordered corporate assembly, we have *not* left behind the necessity for the apostle Paul to be dealing with the ramifications of the Corinthians' self-exalting "spirituality."

Frankly, from this study I have gained a new respect for Paul—specifically his persistent willingness to do battle with the situation in the Corinth church. A lesser man would have given up on them long before. (That he didn't is evidence for his Spirit-gift as an apostle.) The evidence is plentiful that something went horribly wrong in that church after he left. After he committed a lengthy *eighteen months* to establish and nurture the new church, upon the apostle's departure it skewed off-course in so many respects. The evidence also shows that this was not out of misunderstanding, or misguided ignorance, but more out of willful obstinacy, expressed in their argumentative letters to Paul. It is as if after he gave the church a healthy birth, it skipped right over puberty and moved immediately into its teenage rebellion years.

Imagine how much easier it would have been for him to turn his back on a church that had, in so many ways, turned its back on him. But he didn't. He not only committed himself to answering their rebellion with its errant positions, but he continues to respond—in the chapter before us—with profound eloquence. Some of the most memorable passages from Scripture are contained in this chapter.

Chapter Fifteen is all about resurrection. Why did he write it? We have the answer in v12.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:12.**

Some in the church—best guess: a vocal minority that was influencing the rest—held the position that Christ Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead—they were in agreement on that—but, for them, that *didn't* mean that *believers* would be bodily resurrected like Him. Why did Paul consider it important to deal with this errant position at such great length—fifty-eight verses? Verses 13-14:

**But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.**

So this is a vital point in Christian theology and doctrine. Before he closes this letter he will address it thoroughly.

Chapter Fifteen is easily subdivided. Following Gordon Fee’s organization:

### *Verses 1-11: The Resurrection of Christ*

Paul declares their common ground, that Christ was indeed raised from the dead. He also echoes some themes from the previous chapter, that this is (and must be) common ground for *all* who believe in and preach Christ, and that their belief in Christ came through his (Paul’s) apostolic ministry (14:33-38).

Reminiscent of the approach he used in Athens when speaking before the Areopagus, Paul begins with where the Corinthians are at, then uses that as the basis to take them where he wants them to be. To the Athenians he began, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects” (Acts 17:22). From that common basis—your religious; I’m religious: Let’s talk—he leads them to the God of creation, to Christ, and even to His resurrection. To the Corinthians (not coincidentally the city to which Paul went directly from Athens), he also begins with that which is common to them all: the objective truth that Christ Jesus was raised from the dead. From this he then leads them to that which they do not (yet) believe (or have forgotten, or rejected)—that all believers will be raised bodily from the dead.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:20.**

If Christ’s resurrection was the *first* fruits, then that means more “fruit” will follow.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:23. (He had to be first, but we follow)**

### *Verses 12-34: The Certainty of Resurrection*

Paul then addresses and refutes the folly of their position, that even though Christ was raised from the dead, believers will not be raised bodily.

**For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (v16-17)**

### *Verses 35-58: The Resurrection Body*

The apostle concludes by answering the hypothetical questions of v35: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” As he closes this last section, beginning with v50 Paul crescendos into a triumphant hymn of praise and thanksgiving for what God has accomplished in Christ.

**Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 imperishable, and we will be changed. (v51-52)**

### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.**

So now, after that rather lengthy preface, we’re ready to dig into these two verses.

## v1-2

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.*

Paul begins with an introduction that sets the stage for what is to come. More than that, it begins, in v1, with a positive, affirming statement regarding their reception of the gospel he preached to them, followed by, in v2, an implicit warning for them not to deviate *from* that gospel.

Verses 1-2 with v11 form an *inclusio* defining the first section of this chapter, the purpose of which is to remind the Corinthians of the knowledge and belief in which they stand:

v1: “the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved...”

v11: “...so we preach and so you believed.”

Verses 1-2 comprise one convoluted sentence that is difficult to diagram grammatically, but is easy enough to understand. Paraphrasing:

When Paul came to them he  
preached the gospel,  
they received the gospel,  
they stand in the gospel,  
they are (being; present passive tense) saved by the gospel  
That is,  
if you hold fast to the gospel I preached to you  
unless  
you believed in vain. ([more on this later](#))

**Note:** Paul’s use of “gospel” (*evangelion*) in v1 and “the word” (*tini logo*) in v2, in using these two terms Paul does not refer to the reasoning he used or the form of his speech, but to the content of his message, as Thiselton states it, “the substance of the gospel I proclaimed to you.”

Hinted at in the introduction of vv1-2, and stated explicitly in v12, some of the Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead—at least *human* dead. We have to ask: Where did this come from? Where did they get such an idea? Here we have one more example of the beliefs—the “spirituality”—of the surrounding culture seeping in and overwhelming the *true* gospel preached by the apostle.

Surely influenced by the Grecian philosophies—and philosophers—predominant in the society in which they dwelt, they were at odds with Paul over what it meant to be *pneumatikos*—a Spirit-person. Blending together the Christian doctrine of the Spirit with the idea of “spirituality” from the Greeks—putting those two together, as people still do today; they may call themselves Christians, but they have combined Christianity with other beliefs, into a hybrid, which, of course, you cannot do. Some in the Corinthian church were creating a hybrid that started with the indwelling Spirit that Paul preached from the gospel, with the “spirituality” from the Greek culture in which they lived—From that they believed that having acquired the Holy Spirit at conversion, they had now entered the state of true spirituality that is to be: they had already attained (4:8), they had already begun a form of almost angelic-like existence in which the body is no longer necessary or even wanted. This was a core belief of that Greco-Roman idea of spirituality—mostly Greek—that we are spiritual beings, and as such the body, the flesh, is nothing, it doesn’t count for anything. So the body is no longer necessary, or even wanted.

In Chapter Six Paul railed against their idea that, (in accord with the Greeks) being now “spiritual,” flesh was nothing, meaningless, hence what the flesh did (or what one did *with* the flesh) meant nothing. One could call oneself a Christian, be married, yet still visit the pagan temple to partake of the prostitutes there. What did it matter; it’s just the body, just the physical body. It doesn’t mean anything; I’m a spiritual person now. The body is nothing. So put yourself in their shoes. If that is how you think, if that is what you believe, the very thought that their present “body would be raised would have been anathema” (cursed, damnable) to them. (Fee) A horrible thought! This body, that is nothing, you’re telling me that God is going to bring it back, raise it out of the tomb? I don’t want to live with this body for eternity. It was a horrible thought to them based on what they thought he was saying.

Paul fought this in v6:19 with “[To the contrary], do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” What he was saying there was, no your body is not useless: it’s a temple—your physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He will go on to detail to them, in the last section of this chapter, that in any case, this present body is not the one that will be raised. [Let’s jump ahead and look at that.](#) This is why, based on what they have been believing, based on the Grecian influence, this is why he needs to tell them this.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.**

*Here we go, Corinthians, get this, "it is raised a spiritual body." He's telling them, No, the body that will be raised will be a changed body: "we will [all] be changed" (v52). It will be a spiritual body suitable for eternity with God. You cannot dwell with a holy God with a natural, perishable body. No, everything around God must be new, fresh, clean, sinless—perfect. And that's the body that will be raised.*

In a sense, then, the Corinthians were correct: this present flesh *is* throw-away; it will eventually be discarded ("dust to dust"). They were just doing it too soon. Even so, their present position is not just wrong—it is fatal. Note how this ends:

*...if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.*

There are a couple of ways we can interpret the idea of their belief, their faith being "in vain." First, as John MacArthur puts it, they never believed in the first place—i.e., their "faith" was just vanity.

*MacArthur:* A professing Christian who holds to orthodox doctrine and living and then fully rejects it proves that his salvation was never real. He is able to let go of the things of God because *he* is doing the holding. He does not belong to God and therefore God's power cannot keep him. Such a person does not **hold fast the word** because his faith is **in vain**. It was never real. He cannot hold fast because he is not held fast.

Second, as Gordon Fee puts it, "If they do not hold fast to the gospel, that is, if their current position as to 'no resurrection' is correct, then Christ did not rise, which in turn means that they did indeed believe in vain. If they are right, everything is a lie, and they cease to exist as believers altogether."

So understand the difference: MacArthur say, You thought you believed, or you were play-acting that you believed, but you didn't really believe, and that's why you cannot hold to the truth. Gordon Fee puts it, You did believe, you are a Christian, but that in which you believed was a lie. Either can be true.

Either way, as Paul will write later, if this is so, "we are of all men most to be pitied." If you are correct, Corinthians, we are all fools and have been horribly deceived. But they are *not* correct—they were not correct—and Paul will spend the rest of this chapter proving it.