

## Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:1-19](#))

It is important to note that the believers at Corinth did believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ; so Paul started his argument with that fundamental truth. He presented three proofs to assure his readers that Jesus Christ indeed had been raised from the dead.

**Proof #1—their salvation** ([yv. 1-2](#)). Paul had come to Corinth and preached the message of the Gospel, and their faith had transformed their lives. But an integral part of the Gospel message was the fact of Christ's resurrection. After all, a dead Saviour cannot save anybody. Paul's readers had received the Word, trusted Christ, been saved, and were now standing on that Word as the assurance of their salvation. The fact that they were standing firm was proof that their faith was genuine and not empty.

**Proof #2—the Old Testament Scriptures** ([yv. 3-4](#)). *First of all* means "of first importance." The Gospel is the most important message that the church ever proclaims. While it is good to be involved in social action and the betterment of mankind, there is no reason why these ministries should preempt the Gospel. "Christ died... He was buried... He rose again... He was seen" are the basic historical *facts* on which the Gospel stands ([1 Cor. 15:3-5](#)). "Christ died *for our sins*" (author's italics) is the theological explanation of the historical facts. Many people were crucified by the Romans, but only one "victim" ever died for the sins of the world.

When Paul wrote "according to the Scriptures" ([1 Cor. 15:3](#)) he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Much of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ as our substitute and Saviour. The annual Day of Atonement ([Lev. 16](#)) and prophecies like [Isaiah 53](#) would also come to mind.

But where does the Old Testament declare His resurrection on the third day? Jesus pointed to the experience of Jonah ([Matt. 12:38-41](#)). Paul also compared Christ's resurrection to the "firstfruits," and the firstfruits were presented to God on the day following the Sabbath after Passover ([Lev. 23:9-14](#); [1 Cor. 15:23](#)). Since the Sabbath must always be the seventh day, the day after Sabbath must be the *first* day of the week, or Sunday, the day of our Lord's resurrection. This covers three days on the Jewish calendar. Apart from the Feast of Firstfruits, there were other prophecies of Messiah's resurrection in the Old Testament: [Psalm 16:8-11](#) (see [Acts 2:25-28](#)); [Psalm 22:22ff](#) (see [Heb. 2:12](#)); [Isaiah 53:10-12](#); and [Psalm 2:7](#) (see [Acts 13:32-33](#)).

**Proof #3—Christ was seen by witnesses** ([yv. 5-11](#)). On the cross, Jesus was exposed to the eyes of unbelievers; but after the Resurrection, He was seen by believers who could be witnesses of His resurrection ([Acts 1:22](#); [2:32](#); [3:15](#); [5:32](#)). Peter saw Him and so did the disciples collectively. James was a half brother of the Lord who became a believer after the Lord appeared to him ([John 7:5](#); [Acts 1:14](#)). The 500 *plus* brethren all saw Him at the same time ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)), so it could not have been a hallucination or a deception. This event may have been just before His ascension ([Matt. 28:16ff](#)).

But one of the greatest witnesses of the Resurrection was Paul himself, for as an unbeliever he was soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. The radical change in his life—a change which brought him persecution and suffering—is certainly evidence that the Lord had indeed been raised from the dead. Paul made it clear that his salvation was purely an act of God's grace; but that grace worked in and through him as he served the Lord. "Born out of due time" probably refers to the future salvation of Israel when they, like Paul, see the Messiah in glory ([Zech. 12:10-13:6](#); [1 Tim. 1:16](#)).

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At this point, Paul's readers would say, "Yes, we agree that *Jesus* was raised from the dead." Then Paul would reply, "If you believe that, then you must believe in the resurrection of *all* the dead!" Christ came as a man, truly human, and experienced all that we experienced, except that He never sinned. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. If He was not raised, there is no Gospel to preach. If there is no Gospel, then you have believed in vain and you are still in your sins! If there is no resurrection, then believers who have died have no hope. We shall never see them again!

The conclusion is obvious: Why be a Christian if we have only suffering in this life and no future glory to anticipate? (In [1 Cor. 15:29-34](#), Paul expanded this idea.) The Resurrection is not just important; it is "of first importance," because all that we believe hinges on it.

### **When Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:20-28](#))**

Paul used three images to answer this question.

**Firstfruits** ([yv. 20, 23](#)). We have already noted this reference to the Old Testament feast ([Lev. 23:9-14](#)). As the Lamb of God, Jesus died on Passover. As the sheaf of firstfruits, He arose from the dead three days later on the first day of the week. When the priest waved the sheaf of the firstfruits before the Lord, it was a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was God's assurance to us that we shall also be raised one day as part of that future harvest. To believers, death is only "sleep." The body sleeps, but the soul is at home with the Lord ([2 Cor. 5:1-8](#); [Phil. 1:21-23](#)). At the resurrection, the body will be "awakened" and glorified.

**Adam** ([yv. 21-22](#)). Paul saw in Adam a type of Jesus Christ *by the way of contrast* (see also [Rom. 5:12-21](#)). The first Adam was made from the earth, but the Last Adam (Christ, [1 Cor. 15:45-47](#)) came from heaven. The first Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world, but the Last Adam obeyed the Father and brought righteousness and life.

The word *order* in [1 Corinthians 15:23](#) originally referred to military rank. God has an order, a sequence, in the resurrection. Passages like [John 5:25-29](#) and [Revelation 20](#) indicate that there is no such thing taught in Scripture as a "general resurrection." When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will take His church to heaven and at that time raise from the dead all who have trusted Him and have died in the faith ([1 Thes. 4:13-18](#)). Jesus called this "the resurrection of life" ([John 5:29](#)). When Jesus returns to the earth in judgment, then the lost will be raised in "the

resurrection of damnation" ([John 5:29](#); [Rev. 20:11-15](#)). Nobody in the first resurrection will be lost, but nobody in the second resurrection will be saved.

***The kingdom*** ([yv. 24-28](#)). When Jesus Christ comes to the earth to judge, He will banish sin for a thousand years and establish His kingdom ([Rev. 20:1-6](#)). Believers will reign with Him and share His glory and authority. This kingdom, prophesied in the Old Testament, is called "the Millennium" by prophetic teachers. The word comes from the Latin: mille—thousand, annum—year.

But even after the Millennium, there will be one final rebellion against God ([Rev. 20:7-10](#)) which Jesus Christ will put down by His power. The lost will then be raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire. Then death itself shall be cast into hell, and the last enemy shall be destroyed. Jesus Christ will have put all things under His feet! He will then turn the kingdom over to the Father and then the eternal state—the new heavens and new earth—shall be ushered in ([Rev. 21-22](#)).

Good and godly students of the Word have not always agreed on the details of God's prophetic program, but the major truths seem to be clear. Jesus Christ reigns in heaven today, and all authority is "under His feet" ([Ps. 110](#); [Eph. 1:15-23](#)). Satan and man are still able to exercise choice, but God is sovereignly in control. Jesus Christ is enthroned in heaven today ([Ps. 2](#)). The resurrection of the saved has not yet taken place, nor the resurrection of the lost ([2 Tim. 2:17-18](#)).

When will Jesus Christ return for His church? Nobody knows; but when it occurs, it will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" ([1 Cor. 15:52](#)). It behooves us to be ready ([1 John 2:28-3:3](#)).

### **Why Are the Dead Raised? ([1 Cor. 15:29-34, 49-58](#))**

The resurrection of the human body is a future event that has compelling implications for our personal lives. If the resurrection is not true, then we can forget about the future and live as we please! But the resurrection is true! Jesus *is* coming again! Even if we die before He comes, we shall be raised at His coming and stand before Him in a glorified body.

Paul cited four areas of Christian experience that are touched by the fact of the resurrection.

***Evangelism*** ([y. 29](#)). What does it mean to be "baptized for the dead"? Some take this to mean "proxy baptism," where a believer is baptized on behalf of a dead relative; but we find no such teaching in the New Testament. In the second century, there were some heretical groups that practiced "vicarious baptism," but the church at large has never accepted the practice. To begin with, salvation is a personal matter that each must decide for himself; and, second, nobody needs to be baptized to be saved.

The phrase probably means "baptized to take the place of those who have died." In other words, if there is no resurrection, why bother to witness and win others to Christ? Why reach sinners who are then baptized and take the place of those who have died? If the Christian life is only a "dead-end street," get off of it!

Each responsible person on earth will share in either the resurrection of life and go to heaven, or the resurrection of judgment and go to hell ([John 5:28-29](#)). We weep for believers who have died, but we ought also to weep for unbelievers who still have opportunity to be saved! The reality of the resurrection is a motivation for evangelism.

**Suffering** ([yv. 30-32](#)). *I die daily* does not refer to "dying to self," as in [Romans 6](#), but to the physical dangers Paul faced as a servant of Christ ([2 Cor. 4:8-5:10](#); [11:23-28](#)). He was in constant jeopardy from his enemies and on more than one occasion had been close to death. Why endure suffering and danger if death ends it all? "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die" ([Isa. 22:13](#)).

What we do in the body in this life comes up for review at the Judgment Seat of Christ ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)). God deals with the *whole* person, not just with the "soul." The body shares in salvation ([Rom. 8:18-23](#)). The suffering endured in the body will result in glory at the resurrection ([2 Cor. 4:7-18](#)). If there is no future for the body, then why suffer and die for the cause of Christ?

**Separation from sin** ([yv. 33-34](#)). If there is no resurrection, then what we do with our bodies will have no bearing on our future. Immorality was a way of life in Corinth, and some of the believers rejected the resurrection in order to rationalize their sin. "Evil company corrupts good morals" is a quotation from the Greek poet Menander, a saying no doubt familiar to Paul's readers. The believer's body is the temple of God and must be kept separated from the sins of the world ([2 Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)). To fellowship with the "unfruitful works of darkness" ([Eph. 5:6-17](#)) is only to corrupt God's temple.

It was time for the Corinthians to *wake up* and *clean up* (see [1 Thes. 5:4-11](#)). The believer who is compromising with sin has no witness to the lost around him, those who "have not the knowledge of God." What a shameful thing to be selfishly living in sin while multitudes die without Christ!

**Death** ([yv. 49-57](#)). The heavenly kingdom is not made for the kind of bodies we now have, bodies of flesh and blood. So when Jesus returns, the bodies of living believers will instantly be transformed to be like His body ([1 John 3:1-3](#)), and the dead believers shall be raised with new glorified bodies. Our new bodies will not be subject to decay or death.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be." Christians have victory *in* death and *over* death! Why? Because of the victory of Jesus Christ in His own resurrection. Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall also" ([John 14:19](#)).

Sin, death, and the Law go together. The Law reveals sin, and the "wages of sin is death" ([Rom. 6:23](#)). Jesus bore our sins on the cross ([1 Peter 2:24](#)), and also bore the curse of the Law ([Gal. 3:13](#)). It is through Him that we have this victory, and we share the victory *today*. The literal translation of [1 Corinthians 15:57](#) is, "But thanks be to God who *keeps on giving us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ." We experience "the power of His resurrection" in our lives as we yield to Him ([Phil. 3:10](#)).

[First Corinthians 15:58](#) is Paul's hymn of praise to the Lord as well as his closing admonition to the church. Because of the assurance of Christ's victory over death, we know that nothing we do for Him will ever be wasted or lost. We can be steadfast in our service, un-movable in suffering, abounding in ministry to others, because we know our labor is not in vain. [First Corinthians 15:58](#) is the answer to Ecclesiastes, where thirty-eight times Solomon used the sad word *vanity*. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" wept Solomon; but Paul sang a song of victory!