

Article of the Month
November, 2021

I Corinthians 15

INTRODUCTION

There are many references to resurrection in the New Testament -- NONE by that word in the Old Testament. The subject is large and much more complex than many might have considered. This article is not going to try to cover all of the texts which contain this word or its idea. But, since the Apostle Paul delivers such a wonderful and comprehensive treatment of the topic, we can all profit from his treatise in I Corinthians 15 -- even if we only skim through parts of it.

LAYOUT OF THE CHAPTER

We suggest I Corinthians 15 can well be divided into six helpful sections:

(1) Verses 1-11

Here Paul deals with Jesus' resurrection as the item of ***first importance***. Paul points out that it is the basis of the Gospel itself. Since the Gospel is the blessing of all the families of the earth as promised to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), Paul's point is that Jesus had to be resurrected because he is the active agent in doing that work -- the work of resurrecting the human race.

(2) Verses 12-19

In this section, Paul deals with the resurrection of all who will eventually be resurrected.

(3) Verses 20-28

These verses begin to deal with the process of resurrection. Resurrection IS a process, not an instantaneous thing. Awakening for the world of mankind is an instantaneous thing; but resurrection is the work of bringing the awakened person back to the state of perfect harmony with God.

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(4) Verses 29-34

The contents of this section are somewhat parenthetical. Paul steps aside here to scold those of the Corinthians who seem determined to misunderstand the whole resurrection doctrine. He knows they need instruction.

(5) Verses 35-50

Paul here resumes his teaching. But he changes the emphasis. Up until this point, he has dealt with the general subject as it relates to the human race. But in verse 35, he begins to change his focus to the FIRST RESURRECTION -- the spiritual resurrection of those who will have been Jesus' disciples while they were in the flesh. Verse 50 is a transition. Thus it ends one section and begins another.

(6) Verses 50-58

The purpose of these concluding words on the subject is to focus on the the termination of the resurrection process for those in the First Resurrection. It leaves the saints with an encouragement and a determination.

SECTION 1 Verses 1-11

Paul calls Jesus' resurrection "of first importance" (verse 3). It is of such importance that Paul calls upon witnesses to it. Paul says that the Apostles saw him after his death (verses 5 & 7). This is important. They KNEW him and walked with him for 3-1/2 years. These men could not be mistaken about his identity!

Paul calls upon NUMBERS. "He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time" (verse 6). Getting hundreds of witnesses to agree on what they saw is nearly miraculous! But all five hundred were in agreement.

Then Paul speaks of his own witness -- but different from all others. Paul (verse 8) saw Jesus NOT in human form, but as the light which was above the sun at noon-day in its brilliance. And Paul talked with Jesus in this new spirit-nature form. As Paul puts it, he had the honor of seeing Jesus as if Paul were "one untimely born." NO ONE other than Paul has seen or can see Jesus in his glory. But that witness was also necessary.

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SECTION 2 Verses 12-19

Paul's initial remark here is that there is a connection between the fact that Jesus was raised and the fact that others will be resurrected. It is easy to lose sight of the point that Jesus' resurrection is FOR THE PURPOSE of blessing all the families of the earth. Paul reasons that the fate of ALL rests on Jesus' having been resurrected (verses 12-14). Few forget that Jesus is to return. But most forget WHY he returns. He returns specifically to resurrect (restore) mankind.

It may be subtle, but it seems that Paul, in verse 12, is saying, "Do you not know that Jesus' resurrection is NOT a single event? It is only the BEGINNING of three thousand years of resurrecting the Church and the world!"

Then Paul gets personal! He points out that his multitude of witnesses he has mentioned are liars if Jesus is not raised! On top of that, he points out that there is hope for no one if Jesus' resurrection is not fact (because Jesus is the ONE who will bring resurrection to everyone else).

SECTION 3 Verses 20-28

These verses are of extreme importance. In verse 20, Paul says that Jesus' resurrection is merely the FIRST fruitage of God's plan for humanity. His resurrection is ONLY THE BEGINNING of something very large and very great.

In verse 21 Paul makes it VERY LARGE by pointing out that death fell ON THE ENTIRE RACE because of Adam's disobedience. But the UNDOING of that is because Jesus will RESURRECT (completely restore) the human race. The 22nd verse amplifies the thought: "As ALL in Adam die, so also shall ALL in Christ be made alive." Because Jesus will be the "everlasting father" of the race (Isaiah 9:6), he will replace the position of Adam as father of the race. All will be "in him." Adam passed on death. Jesus will pass on life.

However, Paul says there will be an order to this resurrection process (verse 23). Those who will constitute "the Christ" (the "body of Christ" -- faithful Christians), will be resurrected FIRST. Christ's Church has been partaking of the resurrection process in their characters now, in this life. (Philippians 3:10, 11) But AFTER this "first resurrection" group (Revelation 20:6) has been selected and changed into spirit beings, THEN the remainder of the race will be Christ's "during his presence." "During his presence" is a reference to the years of Christ's reign AFTER the "first resurrection" has been completed.

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In verses 24-28, that 1000-year reign is summarized. Jesus will abolish all rule, and authority, and power, and he will have put all enemies "under his feet." At that point, the resurrection process having been completed for the race, he will turn the perfected human race back to God in a condition such as it had before Adam's transgression -- and death will be abolished!

SECTION 4 Verses 29-34

While this section is largely Paul's attempt to sober the thinking of Corinthians whose reasoning on resurrection was faulty, he makes some important points. Verse 29 confirms that the First Resurrection participants have dedicated their lives to the end that they will participate with Jesus in the administration of the general resurrection of the dead. As Paul puts it, faithful disciples are "baptized for the dead." In other words, the baptism (or total dedication of the Church) is so that all of the dead of mankind will be restored (or resurrected) BY THE CHRIST. Paul then tells of his own harrowing experiences endured so that he can participate in the blessing of the human race later.

SECTION 5 Verses 35-50

Once Paul has finished his chastisements, he focuses on the First Resurrection -- not the earthly one which most humans will experience.

His first point (verses 35-41) is that in ANY awakening, it IS NOT the former body that is awakened. The doctrine of "the resurrection of the body" is both false and foolish. There is no need to actually re-constitute the same old molecules! But Paul wants us all to note that results come from character. If we have planted spiritual seeds, we will have spiritual bodies. If we have planted earthly seeds, we will have earthly bodies. The person's mind will be a major factor in the kind of resurrection to be received and the kind of body obtained. God will be the Determiner of this.

When Paul has reached verse 42, he is focussed ONLY on the First Resurrection which REQUIRES a change from human to spirit nature. In the ensuing verses, he stresses that the Church has done its "sowing" while human; but it will do its "reaping" (the receiving of the benefits) as spirit beings. Paul wants to elucidate some of what that means.

During the Church's human experience, it is perishable. A human body DOES perpetually deteriorate! But the Church's awakening will be imperishable. It will have bodies wherein they will have "life within themselves" -- no deterioration! (John 5:26)

The dishonor experienced in this life will turn to honor in the next. The weaknesses of the flesh now, will be turned to perfect power then.

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Paul tells that we are now "a natural body" -- something tangible. But the Church's new bodies will be intangible, "a spiritual body."

Paul then builds on that last point in verses 45-49. Paul contrasts Adam with Jesus -- the two "fathers" of the race. Paul calls Adam "a living soul." This is from Genesis 2:7 where a human soul is defined as the combination of a body of earthly molecules PLUS the spark of life. But, for contrast, Paul lets us know that Jesus (and those of the First Resurrection) will NOT have bodies of earthly molecules. And, because these bodies will have "life in themselves", they will be able to GIVE LIFE to others. Paul's words are: "The last Adam (the final father of the race -- Jesus) is a LIFE-GIVING spirit."

Paul points out, however, that even Jesus (as well as his Church) is first a human, and afterward a spirit being. Paul's words in verse 47 are revealing. "The first Adam (and the first father of mankind) is from the earth" -- he began and ends here. "The second Adam (and the father of the race in the future) is from heaven" -- where he will function in the Millennial Age as the new life-giver (father) of humanity.

Paul concludes these points in verse 50 where he also brings us into a consideration of the details of the "change" to be experienced by the Church in its resurrection's results. His verse 50 focus is: You cannot remain humans if you will be a part of the body of Christ -- the blessers of all the families of the earth. Heaven is not for people. It is for New Creatures in Christ Jesus -- for humans who have sacrificed their humanity so that, being raised as spirit beings, they can be "life-giving spirits" for the remainder of the human race.

SECTION 6 Verses 51-58

Paul now wraps up his sermon with detail of how and when the Church will experience its special resurrection change to the Divine Nature.

In verse 51 Paul expresses a "mystery" -- one not yet understood by many. A part of the Church will have had to "sleep" -- to WAIT in the grave in an unconscious state -- UNTIL it will be changed. But, as a part of this mystery, Paul explains that those of the Church who are yet alive at a certain date, will not have to sleep in the grave before experiencing the culmination of their resurrection process. ALL the saints "shall be changed." But the earlier saints will have had to unconsciously AWAIT that change.

In verse 52, Paul tells the TIME of that change for all the saints. It is "in the last trumpet." This is a reference to Revelation 11:15 -- the time when the final stage in the development of the "body of Christ" is in progress. Until the 7th Trumpet is sounding, there IS NO AWAKENING of the faithful Church or the unfaithful world. But the faithful come first.

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Paul wants it known that in either case (sleeping saints or living saints), the change will be dramatically fast for that individual -- "In a moment; in the twinkling of an eye."

Paul elsewhere (I Thessalonians 4:15) explains that there will be a sequence in the awakening and change of the saints. He says, "We who are alive and remain into the presence of the Lord, SHALL NOT PRECEDE those who have fallen asleep." But all who are then changed into spirit beings, as Paul previously said, will leave their perishability and mortality behind, and "Death will be swallowed up in victory!"

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Thus has Paul summarized the entire subject of the two kinds of resurrections. It is clear that there are TWO salvations: The "Seed of Abraham" (Christ and his "body" -- Galatians 4:28; 3:29) is the promised blessor. THAT is one salvation. That seed will, according to the Abrahamic promise, bless all the families of the earth. THAT is the other salvation. "God is the savior of ALL MEN, especially (as the promised seed) those who believe." (I Timothy 4:10) CLEARLY, the unbelievers (all men) ALSO get saved! What a God!

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