

## 1st Corinthians Chapter 15, Part 1 – John Karmelich

1. We now come to the most important chapter in the book, and arguably the whole bible.
  - a) Chapter 13 was arguably the most important chapter in the book, and some say in the whole bible when it comes to our relationship with other Christians.
  - b) Chapter 15 focuses on the essential doctrines of our Christian relationship with God. If the events of "Chapter 15" are not in place, we could not act out the "love" of Chapter 13.
  - c) If you asked me what the most important chapter in the bible is, my first reaction would be Chapter 15. It is nicknamed the "resurrection chapter", because it focuses on the events of the resurrections of Jesus Christ and the resurrections of believers. The reason I consider it the most important chapter is that if we don't understand the facts about the resurrection then, in a sense, nothing else we do as a Christian matters in the long run.
2. Let's remember that the latter half of the book of Corinthians is Paul addressing issues that were brought up to him by the Corinthian church. The last issue brought up was "spiritual gifts", which covered Chapters 12 through 14. Paul is now moving on to talk about the "resurrection".
  - a) Understand that this letter was addressed to believers in Corinth. Paul believes that the Christians in Corinth were genuine believers in Christ.
  - b) The confusion was not over whether or not Jesus was raised from the dead, but whether or not Christians were raised from the dead. Why were they confused on this issue? It is not stated in the letter. Maybe the views of some of the local Greek religions confused them on this issue. Maybe it was the influence of the "Sadducee" sect of Judaism that didn't believe in the resurrection of people. The important point is they had doubts on this issue of "body resurrection" and that is what Paul wants to correct in this chapter.
3. Before I begin, I want to share a story about my "lunch meetings" with my father some years back: My father died a few years prior to me writing these lessons. For most of my adult life, my father and I would go out to lunch every now and then and talk about life.
  - a) Since I became a strong Christian, a lot of the discussions were stirred in that direction by yours truly. My father grew up Roman Catholic and had a basic understanding of Jesus based a Catholic upbringing. I would not say my father was a strong Catholic, but he told me that at one point in his life, he studied various religions and came to the conclusion that Jesus was God. Why is that relevant to this lesson? Read on. ☺
  - b) My point here has to do with the "resurrection of Christians". I asked my father one time, "What do you think happens to people after they die?" He gave a response that we all exist in some sort of ghost like state. I then explained to him that Jesus said we would be like Him after we died. I also shared that every time Jesus appeared after the crucifixion Jesus always ate food. A purpose was to show that our resurrected bodies can eat food. I remember that shocked him a little and that conversation was the beginning of a road that lead my father to a closer walk with Jesus prior to his death.
  - c) I share that story here, as in a sense that was part of the problem that the Christians in Corinth had: They didn't grasp the concept of what happens to Christians after they die. Even though this chapter does deal with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the purpose of this chapter is to lead into a discussion of the death and resurrection of all believers.
  - d) With that said, I'll come back to my father after the text. Right now, its time to get started.
4. Chapter 15, Verse 1: Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.
  - a) Let's start by remembering the fact that Paul was speaking to Christians. Despite all the problems this church had, Paul still considers them brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - b) The issue at hand is what happens to believers after they die.

- c) For Paul to explain what happens to believers, Paul first needs to explain some aspects of the “Gospel Message”. The reason Paul does this is for them and us to understand that we are raised from the dead the same way Jesus was. While that may be obvious to you and me, it was a confusing issue to the Corinthian church. In the same way my father was uninformed about what happens to people when we die, many today have a “rough” idea of Christianity, but never fully thought out the details and implications to our lives based on a trust of Jesus as Savior.
  - d) With all that said, Paul starts off by reminding the Christians in Corinth of just what “is” the Gospel message. In order to understand what the Gospel message is, Paul is going to define it in Verses 3 and 4. Paul starts by saying in effect that in order to understand what happens to Christians after we die, first one needs to have a good understand of the “Gospel” and the purpose of Jesus rising from the dead.
  - e) There is something implied in these verses that should be stated: One bit of evidence for the legitimacy of Christianity is just how fast and how far it spread in a world with no understanding of Judaism, and no belief in a single God. Most of the Christians in Corinth came from a background that believed in multiple gods and had little to no knowledge of the God of the Old Testament. My point here is the fact that so many people were willing to commit their lives to Jesus and change their way of thinking is evidence all unto itself of the power of God working to accept the Gospel message.
5. Verse 3: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
- a) Yes, it’s Scripture memorization time. ☺ If you have not memorized Verses 3 and 4 of this chapter, you should do so. They are considered two of the most important verses in the New Testament as they clearly define just what is the Gospel message.
  - b) Let’s begin by defining what the “Gospel” is: The English equivalent would be the phrase “The Good News”. The term itself was originally used to describe any type of good news. Early Christians adapted that term to refer to the specific good news of Jesus dying for our sins and God the Father raising Jesus up again.
  - c) It’s important to state what the Gospel is “not”: In Verses 3 and 4, there is nothing in the Gospel message about Jesus' life and ministry on earth. There is nothing about Christians living a good life. There is nothing about “loving one another” or our views on Spiritual gifts. All of these other concepts are important in terms of how Christians are to interact with one another, but those concepts are not part of the “Good News” (i.e., “Gospel”) of Jesus. The “Good News” is all about Jesus paying the price for our sins!
  - d) The first part of the good news is that “Christ died for our sins”.
    - i) What Paul spares us is the gruesome details of how Jesus died. Crucifixion is one of the cruelest methods ever devised to slowly kill someone painfully. God the Father “chose” this method as to emphasize how painful “sin” is, and how much suffering we should receive for our sins. The method also helps to validate that Jesus really did die on the cross as no one could survive that ordeal.
    - ii) The good news is Jesus bore the punishment that we deserved. There is a classic line in Christianity that goes, “If you want to blame someone for the death of Jesus, look in the mirror. He freely gave up his life for your sin and my sin!”
    - iii) The reason we can go to heaven is that the price of our sins was paid. The God we serve is a loving God but also a “just” God. He does not forgive us of the wrongs we have committed. God the Father allowed Jesus to bear the penalty for our sins.
  - e) The second part of these verses say, “According to the Scriptures”.
    - i) When Paul wrote this, there was no New Testament. Therefore, Paul is saying the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would die for the sins of the world.
    - ii) There are lots of places that “hint” of that issue.

- iii) The clearest place to me of this principal is Isaiah Chapter 53. If you read that chapter, it reads like it was written after the events of the cross took place. Yet it was clearly written hundreds of years prior to the event. A Greek translation of the Old Testament was completed in the 1st Century BC.
- iv) Isaiah Chapter 53 describes “someone” dying for the sins of Israel. If you ask a religious Jew about that chapter, they will argue it is about “Israel having to suffer for the sake of the nation of Israel”. If you read the chapter that way, it doesn’t make sense that Israel has to “die” for the sake of Israel. Christians clearly see that as the Messiah (“king”) dying for the sake of Israel.
  - a) There is a minority opinion among some Jewish rabbis that there has to be “two Messiahs”: One to suffer for our sins and another to rule and reign. They get the concept of a Messiah dying for our sins and get the concept of a ruling and reigning Messiah. They don’t believe it’s the same person!
- f) Verse 4 says, “The Christ was buried”.
  - i) Only Paul emphasizes Jesus “burial” as part of the essential message of Christianity. Paul also mentions the burial in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12.
  - ii) Paul’s point is that our “old sinful life” dies when we accept Jesus as our savior. It is the “old nature” that is buried so the “new person” could be made alive.
  - iii) Let me remind you of the “three fold nature of salvation”:
    - a) We “were” saved when we first accepted Jesus. That is the aspect being emphasized with the phrase “The Christ was buried” for our salvation.
    - b) We “are” being saved in that God is continually working in our lives to change us into the person God wants us to be.
    - c) We “will” be saved in that we will be raised up one day and be fully free from sin.
- g) The final part says, “Jesus was raised up on the 3rd day, according to the Scriptures”.
  - i) OK, back to the Old Testament: Where does it say the “Messiah” will be raised up on the third day? You can’t find a clear line on this, only several hints.
  - ii) Jesus himself said that he would be “in the earth” (i.e. dead) for three days and then be raised up the same way “Jonah” was in the belly of the fish for 3 days. (One can read that story in Matthew 12:39-41, and Luke 11:29-32). One can argue that this is what Paul was referring to as the Old Testament “3rd day reference.”
  - iii) The other “hint” I see is the story of Abraham offering Isaac. Abraham knew that God had to resurrect Isaac because God promised that Abraham’s “seed” would continue and grow through Isaac. So when God told Abraham to offer Isaac, Abraham knew God would have to resurrect him. If you read the story carefully, when God first told Abraham to make the sacrifice, it was a three-day journey up the mountain. (Genesis 22:4). When God then told Abraham to kill a ram instead of Isaac that was on the 3rd day. Abraham knew he was acting out prophecy as Abraham declared “So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (Genesis 22:14). The same mountain is also where Jesus was crucified for our sins!
- h) I spent a lot of time going through every phrase of these two verses, as that is the entire message of our salvation. As important as other aspects of Jesus ministry was, and as important as it is love one another, none of those things are part of the Gospel message. The essential message is that God the Father sent His only son to die for our sins. Our belief that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus died for our sins and that God the Father resurrected Jesus is the “whole” of the salvation message.
  - i) This is why salvation is based on “faith alone”. It is the belief in this message that saves us. Our “works” is evidence of that faith, but it is faith alone that saves us.

6. Verse 5: and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.
- a) Now that Paul has laid out what the “Gospel message is”, Paul is now back to the issue of proving Jesus actually rose from the dead. This will lead to “us” rising from the dead.
  - b) The first “clue” of that proof was already discussed in the first three verses. It is the fact that Christianity spread so fast and rapidly based on the God of a relatively obscure religion (Judaism) in a world that believed in multiple gods! While that is not “pure proof” of the Gospel claims, the fact that Christianity rose and spread so quickly is “a” proof that God was working through all of humanity at this point in history.
  - c) Now we move on to Verses 5 through 8. In these verses, Paul lays out other proofs that Jesus did rise from the dead. The reason Paul goes into all of this background is leading up to a discussion of how and why “we” are raised from the dead. To understand our future, it is first necessary to understand every aspect of the Gospel message.
  - d) First, notice who Paul does not mention in these verses: The women who came to the tomb! Paul only lists the men that Jesus appeared to. This is a “cultural” issue. In that time, the testimony of women was not admissible as courtroom evidence. Therefore, Paul ignored the fact that Jesus was first seen by several women. Paul is not “anti-woman”. Paul is simply trying to make a legal argument using legally allowed courtroom evidence.
  - e) In Verse 5, it says Jesus “appeared to Peter”, and then to the “Twelve”.
    - i) Many commentators argue that there was an unrecorded event of Jesus privately appearing to Peter prior to Jesus appearing to all 12 disciples. Since there is no historical record of such an event it is logical speculation.
    - ii) Others argue this refers to when Peter first went into the empty tomb and saw the evidence that Jesus was not there.
  - f) The second reference is Jesus appearing to the “Twelve”. That is a title for the 12 apostles. Since Judas had killed himself at this point (Acts 1:18). My point is that “twelve” is a title and there were not exactly 12 disciples present when Jesus showed up. (John 20:19).
    - i) The reason Paul emphasizes Jesus appearance to Peter and the “12” is most of them were still alive when Paul made this statement. It was further testimony to the proof of Jesus claim that He was raised from the dead.
    - ii) If you ask me my “favorite proof” of Jesus claim of being raised from the dead, it is the life of the “12”. History records that all (almost all that we know of) were killed for their claim and belief that Jesus was God and that He rose from the dead. It is one thing to believe a “lie is true”. I’ve yet to meet one person willing to be tortured and killed for something they know is a lie. That is why the testimony of the disciples “death” stands as proof of the Gospel message.
  - g) The third reference is to “five hundred brothers”. Apparently there were many people witnessed Jesus resurrection. Paul’s point is that many of those 500 are still alive at the time of this letter to Corinth. The Gospels don’t record any reference to 500 people, so this was just a “commonly accepted fact” and not something recorded in the four gospel accounts. It is additional proof of the validity of the resurrection of Jesus.
    - i) When Paul says that some of those “500” are asleep, that is Paul’s way of saying they have died in the sense they are no longer on earth.
  - h) Verse 7 then says Jesus appeared to James and then all the apostles.
    - i) James was an early leader of the church. He was a half-brother of Jesus. There is evidence in the Gospels that Jesus’ brothers did not believe Jesus was the Messiah until probably after the resurrection. Matthew 13:55 says Jesus had four “half” brothers in that Joseph and Mary had a regular family after Jesus was born. Anyway, John 7:5 said Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe in him while Jesus was alive.

- ii) Jesus made an appearance to his half-brother James after His resurrection.
  - a) Personally, at that point, if I were Jesus, I would be yelling at my brothers, “Hey where were you when I was crucified! ☹ So do you believe me “now” that you see me resurrected?” Another sign of the grace of God is to see the grace Jesus had on his family members after the resurrection!
- iii) Verse 7 then says Jesus appeared to “all the apostles”. The word “apostle” means “sent one”. If you run an errand for me, you are a “sent one”. The point here is that there is the “12” apostles, but in a broader definition, there were actually more than 12 apostles. It refers to all the original witnesses of Jesus resurrection who were asked to start the “Great Commission” to spread the news about Jesus.
  - i) Verse 8 says in effect, “and last, Jesus appeared to be, one abnormally born”.
    - i) Paul considered himself the “least” of the apostles, partially because of how Paul tortured Christians prior to his conversion and also due to the fact that “Paul came later” and was not part of the group that saw Jesus die and rose again.
    - ii) A point of Verse 8 is how “humbly” Paul saw himself. Paul understood that he was an apostle. Paul didn’t think of himself as the greatest of the apostles but the “least” of them. Paul never got over the guilt of how he persecuted Christians even though Paul knew he was forgiven of that act!
- 7. Verse 9: For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.
  - a) If you have any doubt that Paul had a sense of guilt about persecuting the church, then read verses 9 and 10. Paul states in Verse 9 that he does not even deserve to be called an apostle based on what he did in the past, but “But by the grace of God I am what I am”.
    - i) In a sense most of us or all of us can make that same statement of “But by the grace of God I am what I am”. Stop and think of all the sins we have committed since we have given our lives to Christ. We are not witnesses for Jesus because we are perfect people. We are witnesses because we are “forgiven” people.
    - ii) In other words, the only reason we are witnesses for Jesus is not based on our past actions, but because of the grace of God forgiving us of our sins.
  - b) There is another key point in Verse 11: “I worked harder than all of them”. Paul considered himself the least of all the apostles based on his past conduct. At the same time, Paul states he worked harder at preaching Jesus than all of the other apostles. Whether or not that statement is true, is a personal opinion of Paul’s. Paul did not just accept God’s forgiveness for persecuting Christians, and then Paul went on his merry way! The point is Paul used the grace of God to live his life to make a difference for Jesus!
    - i) There is the lesson to be learned. God wants us to use the grace (forgiveness) He has given us for our sins to then go out and make a difference for Him!
    - ii) In other words, it is about “hard work”. It is about relying on God’s strength to go out and make a difference for Him. For some people that means going into the mission fields around the world. For others, it is the “mission field of our front yard”. The point is in all we do, we are to make a difference for Christ!
  - c) Paul’s final point in Verse 11 is saying in effect, “Whether you believe the Gospel message based on what I preached or based on what other apostles preached, the point is you believed the Gospel message and changed your life based on that belief.
  - d) Paul’s main concern is not that they accept Paul as an apostle as much as they (church in Corinth) believe and accept the Gospel message. Paul wanted people to commit their lives to serve Jesus based on “whatever evidence” they believed as long as they changed their lives in a way to serve God.

8. Verse 12: 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? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.
- a) Now we get into the "heart" of this chapter: Paul says in Verse 12, "how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Apparently some Christians from Corinth wrote or contacted Paul to say that they (or other believers) have doubts about Christians being resurrected from the dead.
    - i) In other words, the issue at hand is not that Jesus was raised from the dead, but whether or not God raises up believers and how does God do that?
    - ii) In order for Paul to give that answer, first Paul needed to lay out proofs that Jesus was raised from the dead. That was the key issue of the first 11 verses.
  - b) Paul is going to lay out his arguments why we as Christians are raised from the dead. Paul starts with the fact that Christ was raised from the dead.
    - i) Paul's opening argument is the issue that, "Well, if there is no resurrection from the dead then how was Christ raised up?" Remember there were Christians in Corinth that had the false notion that Jesus was raised from the dead, but that was "it", nobody else would be raised up! Paul counters that argument by starting with the premise they do accept: Jesus was raised from the dead.
9. Verse 14: And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
- a) Our salvation depends upon the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then it is a waste of time to have faith in that fact. That is the simple point of this verse.
10. Verse 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.
- a) Paul is using the "what if" argument to make his case. He is saying that "what if" Christ was not raised from the dead? If Jesus was not raised, then nobody else is as well.
  - b) The point is that God cannot just "forgive" sins. God would not be "just" in His judgments if he just forgave us and that was that. The only way God can be "forgiving and be just" at the same time would be if God Himself paid the price for our sins! That's the idea behind the cross! It is God showing His love and His justice at the same time.
    - i) With that said, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we are still "in our sins" because God cannot just forgive us of our sins without dealing with justice.
    - ii) If Jesus did not rise again, it would mean that those who have died believing in Jesus would be "lost" as they still have died with their sins "in tact".
  - c) A lot of this stems from the concept that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin!" (See Hebrews 9:22). While one cannot find a blunt passage in the Old Testament that makes this statement, it is a principal all through the book of Leviticus. In Leviticus God required animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins: Why? To show that sin "hurts" and it hurts innocent people! Thus the "innocent" have to suffer for the sake of sins. Therefore, innocent animals were killed as a symbolic act to show that the shedding of innocent blood is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus fulfilled that requirement of the innocent suffering as a payment for the sake of the guilty!
    - i) The idea to understand that without Jesus dying for our sins and being raised by God, our faith in Him is "futile".
11. Verse 19: If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
- a) Paul finishes this "what if" discussion by saying in effect that if Christ was not raised from the dead, we as Christians should be "pitied" for all the self-sacrifice we make for the sake of the Gospel message! We are wasting our lives if this Gospel is not true!

12. Verse 20: But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
- a) Paul now stops his "what if" negative argument and states the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. The reason Paul mentioned all of those "still living" witnesses to Jesus' resurrection is meant as proof that Jesus was raised from the dead.
  - b) Jesus is the "first" person to actually enter heaven that was raised from the dead.
  - c) What about all the "saints" who died prior to Jesus' resurrection? The answer comes from a story (not a parable) told in Luke's gospel, Chapter 16. The story is about two men who died. One was unnamed (a beggar) who got to enter the "good part" of hell and one named Lazarus who entered the "bad part" of hell. Apparently, prior to Jesus, saved people were held in a "nice holding tank" until Jesus could rise from the dead. Then those who were saved prior to Jesus' death and resurrection were resurrected at that point.
  - d) I need to explain the concept of the "first fruits": There is a Jewish holiday that was part of a series of holidays associated with "Passover". When we say, "I'll be home for the holidays", we mean Christmas and New Year's together. The Jews had a similar concept in that there were three holidays ordained by Moses that ran together. "Passover" is the most famous of the three as that holiday is when the Lord's Supper took place! One of the other three holidays was called "first fruits". The first of the spring harvest was offered to God on that day. The day the actual first fruits is offered is the "day after the Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:15) and appears to be the first regular Sabbath after the Passover supper. In the year Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, the first day after the "regular Sabbath" after the Passover was the same Sunday Jesus rose from the dead.
    - i) The point is the "firstfruits" ritual is about the first grain of a new harvest being offered to God. The first "firstfruits" after Jesus was raised from the dead is those saints who have previously died (called "fallen asleep") now got to go to heaven.
    - ii) Tying together the ritual of the fruit fruits with the story of the "beggar in the good part of hell", it appears that on the day of the "first fruits" after Jesus rose from the dead, the saints who were in the "good part of hell" then got to go to heaven as they were the "firstfruits of those who were saved".
    - iii) Confused? Just remember that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and go to heaven and after that, came the eternally saved who died prior to Jesus.
  - e) Meanwhile, Paul is still explaining the "why and how" of how the dead are raised. ☺
13. Verse 21: For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
- a) Paul's point here is that God works in "patterns". When Adam and Eve sinned, all humans "died" in the sense that a "sin disease" was then passed on to all humans. Let me put it this way: Are you or I perfect? No. We all have a tendency to do the wrong thing even though we know the right thing to do. That's the "sin disease" being passed on from one generation to the next!
  - b) Even "innocent babies" are born with the sin gene. I believe a fair God will judge all people fairly, including the fate of babies that die at birth. The point here is that children don't have to be taught how to lie and steal to get what they want. It is part of our nature!
  - c) The point of the verse is "Adam blew it for us". We can't go back and tell Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit. The damage is done and we are part of the consequences.
  - d) Therefore, God the Father decided that another man was needed to bring an end to sin just as one man (Adam) was responsible for bringing sin in the world. A reason Jesus had to change from "fully God" to "fully man and still be fully God" is so that a "man" could lead the way to salvation and away from the damage caused by eternal sin.
  - e) Paul's point is just as "death" came from one man (Adam), so eternal life comes from another man (Jesus) that bears the penalty for "death".

14. Verse 22: For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
- a) Verse 22 states the point more bluntly that was being implied in the last few verses: It is that we all “die” due to Adam’s sin. We “die” in the sense that our sinful nature is our downfall and we all deserve eternal punishment in that the “sin disease” is incurable. The idea of God eternally punishing humans due to what Adam did can be thought of as a “mercy killing” (like when an injured horse is killed) as the sin factor is incurable.
  - b) To resolve the sin problem, God sent His only Son so the payment for sin can be taken care of. That is why the simple belief in what Jesus did for our sins and the belief that Jesus is God is the basis of our salvation.
  - c) People always wonder: What about those who never heard of Jesus? Romans Chapter 1 addresses that issue. In summary, God will judge all people fairly based on what they knew and how they lived their lives based on what they knew. Do I understand all the details? No. Do I trust that a perfect God will be perfectly fair in judging people? Yes. With that said, I don’t worry about that issue. God calls all Christians to spread the gospel message. The fate of those who never heard of Jesus is God’s problem. Our job is just to be witnesses for Jesus and live our lives accordingly.
15. Verse 23: But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.
- a) Verse 23 explains the “order” in which people get to go to heaven.
    - i) Jesus was the first human admitted to heaven.
    - ii) Then came and “comes” the “firstfruits”. The firstfruits include those that died who are saved prior to Jesus. The firstfruits include all Christians who die and will die prior to Jesus Second Coming. The first fruits would include you and me, assuming we die prior to Jesus Second Coming.
    - iii) The “final group” is those who are saved at the time of Jesus Second Coming.
  - b) Paul is dividing all saved people into “three groups”. 1) Jesus himself, 2) Those who were and are being saved prior to Jesus Second Coming. That includes all who are going to heaven any time in human history prior to the Second Coming. 3) Those who are alive on earth at the time of the Second Coming.
  - c) As to the Second Coming itself, the moment of Jesus appearing may be an instantaneous thing, but the events leading up to it covers a seven-year time span.
  - d) This reminds me: A Christian’s view on the rapture of the church (i.e., those who are saved at the time of Jesus Second Coming) is not part of the entrance requirements to heaven. In other words, Christians have various views as to some of the details of Jesus Second Coming. Having the correct view is not a requirement for salvation. Paul lays out the only requirements for salvation in Verses 3 and 4 of this letter, and one’s view on end times, (assuming it is “a” biblically supportable view) is not a requirement for salvation!
16. Verse 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.
- a) Paul just described how all people are resurrected. Again, we have the three groups: 1) Jesus himself, 2) all that are saved prior to the Second Coming and 3) those who are saved at the time of Jesus Second Coming.
  - b) In Verse 24, Paul is describing what happens to us after all three acts are completed.
    - i) Remember that the “kingdom” does not refer to a physical location. The idea of a kingdom refers to the collection of all believers. Remember Jesus said that “He was a king and his kingdom was not of this world”. (John 18:36 and 37).
    - ii) Part of the idea of Jesus Second Coming is the destruction of all other authority over us! God not only destroys Satan and his followers, but also the concept of sin ruling over us. The idea is that when we are all saved, we become sinless beings.
    - iii) Once there is no more ability for those in the kingdom (saved people) to sin, then the kingdom gets handed over to God the Father. He is in command!

- c) A concept most Christians struggle with is the “Trinity” and how it functions! That word “trinity” is not in the bible. I consider the word “trinity” a solution to the problem of “three in one”, not a problem all unto itself. In Verse 24 we read of Jesus “handing over the kingdom” to God the Father. That does not mean Jesus is a lower entity than God the Father. It does mean that if there is a group of two or more, somebody has to be the appointed leader and God the Father is the leader.
- i) Part of Jesus role is to prepare saved people (“the kingdom”) to live forever with God the Father. Once that job is completed, Jesus turns us over to God the father.
  - ii) In the same way any son is considered inferior in status to any father, so God the son is inferior to God the Father in that the Father is the “leader”. That is why we are “turned over” to God the Father to live with Him for eternity.
17. Verse 25: For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> 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.
- a) Let’s pause for a moment and remember why we are going through this exercise in studying the future-history of mankind. There were Christians in Corinth that didn’t understand or didn’t believe that God raised up people from the dead. They understood and believed God the Father could and did raise up Jesus. They didn’t believe God could and would want to raise up believers as well.
    - i) Paul is laying out for us God’s “eternal purpose” for mankind. For those who are willing to accept the Gospel message, God has an eternal plan for us. That plan includes raising us from the dead. That is why Paul lays out this detailed argument about why we are raised from the dead and what is our eternal destiny.
  - b) Now back to Verse 25: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”
    - i) The “he” in this verse is Jesus. He is “reigning now” in the fact that all believers of Jesus are part of His kingdom and He is reigning over that kingdom.
    - ii) So why doesn’t Jesus come back now and end all of this sin and suffering?
      - a) Think of it this way: If Jesus decided to come back 5, 10 or say, 100 years ago, you and I would not be saved. Be grateful that God is still waiting for more people to be saved and that includes you and me.
      - b) Why does God allow evil to exist in the world in the meantime? Let’s put it this way: Suppose every time somebody was about to hit someone else, an angel stepped in and stopped them. We may think it’s a good idea, but the problem is then God is interfering with our free will. What about all the innocent that suffer? That is the long-term cause of “free will” and sin in the world. That is why the only reason I can take comfort is in the fact that God is fair and will judge all people fairly one day.
  - c) Verse 26 says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
    - i) I stated just a moment ago that if Jesus decided to come back 5, 10 or say, 100 years ago, you and I would not be saved. We should be grateful of that fact. That does not mean God will go on “forever” seeing who will and who will not accept Him! Sooner or later, there has to be a “day” when Jesus wraps this up.
    - ii) Just as the world has a beginning, it has to have an ending as we know it! There eventually has to be a moment in time when “death” comes to an end.
    - iii) The shortest verse in the bible is the one that just says, “Jesus wept”. (John 11:35). Jesus wept when everyone around Him was sad that His friend Lazarus had died. Jesus knew that Lazarus would spend eternity in heaven. I believe Jesus “wept” over the pain caused by death. Let’s face it, when Lazarus came back to life in John Chapter 11, Lazarus would have to die again and deal with the pain of death again. My point is that Jesus understood “death” as an enemy to be destroyed!

- d) Verse 27 is making the point that “God Himself” (The Father) is not part of the “everything” that is subject to Jesus. Paul wants to make sure his audience understands that the one exception to the “Everything is subject to Jesus” rule is God the Father.
    - i) It was God the Father that set up this system that puts everything under the rule of God the Son. This is why we can’t do an “end run around Jesus” to approach God the Father. The only way to salvation is through Jesus. (See John 14:6).
    - ii) Jesus said, “That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” (John 5:23 NIV). The point is similar to this verse. It is that God the Father set up the system that God the Son is in charge of all things, including raising up the saved to eternal life and one day bringing an end to all “enemies” of God’s kingdom, including death itself, sin itself and Satan with his followers.
18. Verse 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.
- a) Verse 28 is saying that when Jesus has accomplished all that God the Father has asked Jesus to do, then the Son will be made subject to God the Father.
  - b) Let me put it this way: Once all the saved people are in heaven in our new resurrected bodies, and once there is no more death, no more suffering and no more sin to influence our lives, Jesus “work” is now done. We, including Jesus can now enjoy being “one” with God the Father. In that sense we as believers inherit “everything” for all eternity.
  - c) The final phrase of this verse is “so that God may be all in all”. In heaven, somehow we all become “one with God”. I truly have no idea what that entails, but I trust it to be true. Each Christian will have a separate physical body in heaven, but somehow, we will fully understand God the Father just as He is and be “one with him”.
  - d) At the same time, God the Son is still subject to God the Father and we too, will be subject to God the Father for all of eternity.
19. Verse 29: 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?
- a) Verse 29 is a source of great confusion. For example, the Mormons use this verse as their basis for baptizing dead people thinking that baptism for the dead gets those dead people saved and into heaven.
  - b) Here is the secret to understanding Verse 29: Whenever Paul refers to saved Christians who have died, Paul always says they have “fallen asleep”. Paul uses that phrase not to literally mean dead Christians are asleep, nor to literally mean dead Christian souls are asleep in their bodies. The term “fallen asleep” is used by Paul to refer to the fact that from our perspective, we can no longer communicate with those departed souls, so we can think of them as being “asleep”. From God’s perspective, they are saved and we will spend eternity with them in heaven. This is why I hold the view that eternity has no “time” and somehow, from our perspective, all saved people get to heaven at the same “moment” in eternal time.
  - c) With all of that said, back to Verse 29. Let me give a few theories on this verse:
    - i) One theory is that Paul is talking about the practice of baptizing those who are giving their lives to Jesus. Maybe some Christians were killed and never had a chance to be baptized. Maybe there was some sort of funeral-like ritual to baptize them as a public sign of their allegiance to Jesus.
    - ii) Another theory is that Paul is being sarcastic here and is referring to some pagan practice of baptizing dead people. That is why I made such a big deal about the fact that Paul always uses the phrase of “being asleep” to refer to dead Christians.
    - iii) The important point is that the only way for people to be saved is to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Paul could not be talking about saving those who have died who refuse to make that statement. Salvation is always an individual decision.

- iv) One cannot take an action that would cause a dead person to be saved. That would be contradictory to the Gospel message that salvation is an individual decision based on accepting Jesus as one's savior.
  - v) Given the fact that salvation is up to the individual and the fact one cannot save a literally dead relative through baptism, Paul cannot be literal in this verse. He is either being sarcastic or he is stating that the purpose of baptism is to confirm one's individual salvation.
  - d) Paul's other point of this verse gets back to the main topic of how God saving people for eternity. The point is if our ritual of baptism is a waste of time, then no one is saved and no one but Jesus is going to heaven.
20. Verse 30: And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? <sup>31</sup> I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup> If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."
- a) Remember the goal of this chapter: To explain that Christians not only are raised from the dead, but that we get to live with God forever in heaven.
  - b) The point of these verses is Paul saying in effect, "If all there is to life is this life on earth, then why am I (Paul) wasting my time preaching the Gospel? I should be just enjoying this life as much as possible as then I'll die one day, and that will be that!"
  - c) In Verses 30-32, Paul gives a brief description of how much suffering he has done for the sake of the gospel message. If you read about Paul's life, it was one of constant peril. In 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 11, Verses 23-29, Paul goes into further detail of how much suffering he has done for the sake of the Gospel message.
    - i) Paul got spiritual resistance to the Gospel message and Paul got human resistance. He had his life threatened in numerous occasions all due to the work of wanting to spread the Gospel message.
    - ii) Paul's point is that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, and Christians are not raised from the dead, Paul would be wasting his time and his life. Paul might as well be focusing on things of this world if there was no life after we die.
  - d) Paul is not saying that all Christians are called to be martyrs. Paul is not saying that all Christians are called to travel around the world and save as many for Christ. Most of us are called to be witnesses just where we are. There is going to be a resurrection of all people: Some to heaven and some to hell. For that reason, God calls us to live for Him in that we are to tell as many as possible about one's eternal reward or fate and at the same time work with other Christians to help each other encourage our faith.
    - i) In other words, our purpose for living is not to say, "OK, I'm now saved, you are your problem, not mine". The idea of "loving one another" is to make every effort to care about the lives of other Christians and those who one day might become Christians, which is why we spread the Gospel message.
    - ii) Again, it does not necessarily mean we have to quit our jobs or leave our present circumstances. Usually God wants to work with us and on us just where we are. For some people "moves" are necessary and that is a separate topic.
  - e) Let me discuss the phrase: "I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons".
    - i) Most commentators believe the "wild beast" reference is not to literal animals but to people who wanted to kill Paul and end his life. I only say that because there is no written record of Paul fighting animal beasts in Ephesus, but there are recorded stories in Acts of human resistance Paul encountered in Ephesus.
21. Verse 33: Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." <sup>34</sup> Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame.
- a) Paul stops his theology lesson to remind the Corinthians to focus on what is important!

- b) A good question to ask here is: Why did the Christian church in Corinth have their doubts about eternal life in heaven with Jesus? What caused that doubt and could it happen to any of us? The answer is to look at Verse 33. It says, "Bad company corrupts good character." When we as Christians start hanging around with the wrong crowd, it is amazing what things we can believe!
- i) Let me put it this way: Can any of us start spending time with people who doubt the existence of Jesus and the fact that salvation requires accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Of course. Sometimes those people are relatives and we "have" to spend some time with them. What Paul is encouraging is for us to avoid those that can cause wrong thinking. If we are in situations where we can't avoid such people, such time needs to be balanced with time with other Christians.
- c) Notice Paul uses the term "sinning". The only possible "sin" we are aware of here is the Corinthian ignorance about salvation. Can that be considered a "sin"? Remember that sinning is "missing the mark" of what God wants for our lives. We normally think of sinning when we are tempted to do something that is a violation of say, one of the Ten Commandments. When we are tempted to take something that doesn't belong to us, we normally think of that as a sin. Well, Jesus said the most important commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength". Let's face it, if we are spending time with those who doubt the Gospel story and are starting to believe their doubts that would be considered a sin that needs to be confessed.
- i) Does this mean we have to "blindly" accept the Gospel as truth? Of course not. Paul uses this whole chapter to lay out actual evidence for Jesus resurrection from the dead and uses that as a basis to explain what happens to us for all of eternity.
- d) Finishing the text, notice that Paul does not call the Christians in Corinth "unsaved". Despite their periods of doubts about the resurrection of the dead, Paul wants to "shame" them for their sin, but that's different from losing one's salvation.
- i) Remember that once one seriously and completely commits one's life to Christ, it is not "our goodness" that saves us, but it is about God keeping His word. It may be a shame when we sin, but we can't lose our salvation based on our ignorance or by sinning enough to undo what Jesus did on the cross! The Christians in Corinth were still saved because they were still trusting in Jesus as payments for their sins despite their turning from the fact that they themselves will be resurrected.
22. With that said, I'm going to wrap up this lesson at this point:
- a) For those of you who did not read the first line on Page 1, it said, "Chapter 15, Part 1". My point is I'm not going to get through the entire chapter in this lesson. There is too much theology to be explained in just one lesson on Chapter 15.
- b) Besides, if I consider Chapter 15 the most important chapter in the New Testament, do you think I would limit the study of this chapter to just one lesson? ☺
- c) I also want to say something to those of you who pretty much "know all of this stuff". If you have read this lesson and thought, "I don't have doubts about my own resurrection", what I can learn from this lesson?
- i) With that said, think again what I said in the beginning about my lunches with my father. My father believed Jesus is God but never thought out what that meant for his own future until I explained it to him. I promise you there is, or will be someone in your life who may accept the idea of Jesus rising from the dead, but never thought out the "implications" of what that means for the rest of their life!
- ii) The principals Paul lays out in this chapter are also designed to teach us how to explain the "Good news" to others and to explain what salvation is all about. It doesn't mean one has to memorize this chapter to recite it to others. It does mean one should understand what is (and is not) the Gospel message so we can explain what that means to others around us.

23. Let's pray: Father, thank you for laying out for us, the details of what happens to us in the next life. Let that be a motivation for us, not only to live for You, but to share that message with others around us. Help us during our times of doubts and help us to look to You to understand the purpose and destiny of our lives with You. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.