

Notes for 1st Corinthians - Chapter 15 (Page 1 of 8)

(Pages 1-3 were for Lesson #1. Pages 4-8 are for Lesson #2)

Introduction – Chapter 15 focuses on the events of Jesus second coming.

1. Chapter 15 is nicknamed the "resurrection chapter" because it focuses on the events of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrections of believers.
2. This chapter is laid out as a "legal case". Paul gives a court style argument for the resurrection.
3. A lot of Christians and non-Christians are confused on the salvation issue.
 - a. Some wrongly believe that people are saved if their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds.
 - b. Some believe we exist in a "ghost like state" after we die. A good point to make is that whenever Jesus appeared after the resurrection in the Gospels, He ate food.

Verses 3-4: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," (NIV translation is used in this study)

1. Paul begins by defining the Gospel. Since we are saved by the Gospel it should be defined.
 - a. The term "Gospel" literally means "The Good News".
2. The first part of the good news is that "Christ died for our sins".
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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!"
 - c. 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.
3. The second part of these verses say, "Christ died... According to the Scriptures".
 - a. At this time, there was no "New Testament". It has to be an Old Testament Reference.
 - b. The clearest place to find this is "Isaiah Chapter 53. Here is a sample (Verses 4-5):
 - i. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.
4. Verse 4 says, "The Christ was buried".
 - a. Paul's point is that our "old sinful life" dies when we accept Jesus as our savior. It is our "old nature" that is buried so the "new person" could be made alive.
 - b. Let me remind you of the "three fold nature of salvation":
 - i. We were saved when we first accepted Jesus. That is what is being emphasized with the phrase "The Christ was buried" for our salvation.
 - ii. We are being saved in that God is continually working in our lives to change us into the person God wants us to be.
 - iii. We will be saved in that we will be resurrected one day and be fully free from sin.
5. Verse 4 then says, "Jesus was raised up on the 3rd day".
 - a. Jesus 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. (See Matthew 12:39-41).
 - b. Another comparison is Abraham offering Isaac. Abraham knew God had to resurrect Isaac because God promised that Abraham's "seed" would continue through Isaac.
 - i. Genesis (22:4) says it was three days from the announcement to the offering.
 - c. Abraham knew he was acting out prophecy as the text says, "So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide." (Genesis 22:14).

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Verse 5: "and that he (Jesus) appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."

1. Paul did not mention the women who came to the tomb. This was a cultural issue, as the testimony of women was not accepted in court.
2. Verse 5 says Jesus appeared to Peter. This is when Peter and John came to the tomb.
3. Next Jesus appeared to the "12". That was a title for the 12 apostles.
 - a. Some of the apostles were still alive at this point in history. One of my favorite proofs of the resurrection is the witness of the "12". History records that most were tortured and killed for their belief in Jesus. In history, many have died for what they believe is the truth. No one would be willingly tortured for what he or she knew was a lie. The fact the apostles were willing to die in violent manners for their belief in Jesus is a good Gospel support.
4. The third reference is to "five hundred brothers". Apparently there were many who witnessed Jesus resurrection. The point is many of those 500 were still alive when this letter was written.
5. Verse 7 then says Jesus appeared to James and then to all the apostles.
 - a. Jesus made an appearance to his half-brother James after His resurrection.
 - b. 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.
6. Verse 8 says in effect, "and last, Jesus appeared to me (Paul), one abnormally born".
 - a. Paul considered himself the least of the apostles, due to his life prior to conversion.
 - b. The reason Paul thinks he is the least of the apostles is discussed in Verse 9.

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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

1. 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".
 - a. The only reason we are witnesses for Jesus is not based on our goodness, but because of the grace of God working in our lives.
 - b. The point is Paul used the grace of God to live his life to make a difference for Jesus.

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? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."

1. 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? That is the next topic of this chapter.
2. 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.

Verse 19: If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

1. 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!

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Verse 20: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

1. Jesus is the first "entity" to actually enter heaven that was raised from the dead.
2. What about all the "saints" who died prior to Jesus' resurrection? The answer comes from Luke's gospel, Chapter 16. In this story (not a parable) two men 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 resurrection now enter heaven."
3. I need to explain the concept of the "first fruits": This was a Jewish holiday.
 - a. The first of the spring harvest was offered to God on that holiday ("Firstfruits").
 - b. The holiday 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, "first fruits" was the same day as Jesus rose from the dead.
 - c. 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.

Verse 21: "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man."

1. Paul's point here is that God works in patterns. When Adam and Eve sinned, all humans "died" in the sense that a "sin gene" was then passed on to all humans.
2. 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.
3. 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.

Verse 23: "But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

1. Verse 23 explains the order in which people get to go to heaven.
 - a. Jesus was the first to enter heaven.
 - b. Then comes the "firstfruits": The firstfruits include those that died who are saved prior to Jesus. It includes all Christians who die and will die prior to Jesus Second Coming.
 - c. The "final group" is those who are saved at the time of Jesus Second Coming.

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.

1. Remember that the "kingdom" does not refer to a physical location. The idea of a kingdom refers to all believers as "one unit". Remember Jesus said that "He was a king and his kingdom was not of this world". (John 18:36 and 37).
2. 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.
3. That does not mean Jesus is a lower deity than God the Father. It means that if there is a group of two or more, somebody has to be the appointed leader and God the Father is that leader.

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Verse 25: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ 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."

1. 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.
2. So why doesn't Jesus come back now and end all of this sin and suffering?
 - a. If Jesus decided to come back say, 100 years ago, we would not be saved. Be grateful that God is still waiting for more to be saved.
 - b. Why does God allow evil to exist in the world in the meantime? The "short answer" is God has to allow free will. Our love relationship with God must include the "free will choice" on our part to accept Him. Therefore God allows the "free will of sin" to exist.
3. Verse 26 says the "last enemy to be destroyed is death".
 - a. 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.
 - b. The shortest verse in the bible is the one that just says, "Jesus wept". (John 11:35). I believe Jesus wept over the pain caused by death. Let's face it, every miracle Jesus did was "short term" in that those people who received miracles would eventually die again.
4. Verse 27 is making the point that "God Himself" (The Father) is not part of the "everything" that is subject to Jesus. The exception to the "Everything is subject to Jesus" rule is God the Father.

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."

1. 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.
2. 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.

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?"

1. Here is the secret to understanding Verse 29: Whenever Paul refers to saved Christians who have died, Paul always uses the term "fallen asleep". In Verse 29 Paul uses the phrase "the dead".
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Paul's other point gets back to the topic of how is God saving people for eternity. The point is a baptism ritual is a waste of time if that person being baptized is not saved.

Verse 30 - "And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² 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."

1. Paul saying in effect, "If all there is, is this present life, then why am I (Paul) wasting my time preaching the Gospel? I should be just enjoying this life and then I'll die and that will be that!"
2. 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.

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Verse 33: "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." ³⁴ 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."

1. Can any of us start spending time with people who doubt the existence and salvation message of Jesus? Of course. Sometimes such people are relatives and we "have" to spend some time with them. Paul is encouraging us to avoid those that can cause bad thinking. If we can't avoid such people, such time needs to be balanced with time with other Christians.
2. Notice Paul uses the term "sinning". Remember that sinning is "missing the mark" of what God wants for our lives. Jesus said the most important commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength". If we are spending time with those who doubt the Gospel story and are starting to believe their doubts that is a sin that needs to be confessed.

Verse 35: "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

1. Paul is now starting to describe how we are resurrected. Paul compares the concept of being resurrected to "seeds" of plant life. For a seed to sprout, first it has to "die" in that it disconnects from its previous plant life.
 - a. Paul is describing the literal aspect of seeds "dying" and then coming to life again.
 - b. Paul is also being "symbolic" in that our life before we accepted Christ must die in order to start a new life with Christ. It means we "instantly" become forgiven of our sins, past present and future. We have "died" to our old life.
 - c. When we are resurrected into heaven, God takes the "basic building blocks" that is in our bodies. When we get resurrected, we will be able to recognize each other, but at the same time, we will have better, "perfect" bodies that are suitable to live in heaven.

Verse 38: "But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

³⁹ All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor."

1. Paul's main point is that everything has a distinct body. Humans can only reproduce other humans. We can't make monkeys or dogs based on human seeds.
2. Paul's point is there is a "distinction" between different animals and different "things in the sky" that cannot be explained by "random selection".
3. "If your favorite pet and a human stranger were both drowning, and you could only save one, who would it be?" While it would be "instinctive" to save the loved pet, I would probably choose the human as I understand the sanctity and purpose of human life.

Verse 42: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

1. If "heaven" is where God is, then it must have "conditions" where are bodies can live forever. Our current bodies are designed to survive in an earth environment.
2. Using the same line of logic, when we are resurrected, it must be into some "bodily form" that is designed to exist and thrive in heaven. If we are going to live forever, then our new body must be "perfect" in the sense it cannot decay nor wear out.
3. The only clues we have about our resurrected bodies come from the descriptions of Jesus after He was resurrected. The bible says, "We will be like Him" after we are resurrected. (1st John 1:32).

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Verse 42-43 (cont.):

4. This leads to a popular theory that in heaven we exist in more than three dimensions. We as humans can only "perceive" in three dimensions, which is why when people saw Jesus after the resurrection, they only saw the three dimensions. The fact that Jesus instantly appeared in a locked room after His resurrection could be a support for this argument. (See John 20:19.)
5. Other than this chapter and a few other passages, the bible says very little about what heaven is like or what we do for eternity! It is as if God wants us to focus on the "here and now" and we are to let Him worry about the next life.

Verse 44: "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

1. For starters, it would not be fair of God to have this life as all there is. What does one say to a young child dying of cancer, "Tough luck kid? Sorry about that!" If there was no eternal life, then this world as we know it is a very unfair place to live!
2. Next, think of humans like "computer hardware and software". If one understands how a computer is assembled, that would not explain how the software (e.g., a word processing program) runs on the computer. In that sense, the "real us" is like the software. We are like the "software program" that makes the decisions that affect our bodies. Our bodies contain the "real us" and our physical bodies change over time.

Verse 45: "So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."

1. In Verses 45 to 49, we have a comparison of Adam and Jesus. The idea is that Adam was the first living being and whether we like it or not, we are all indebted to Adam for the "sin disease" that is past on to the whole human race. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, it was far more than sinning, it was the idea that their physical bodies would now experience decay and we would have to live with the consequences of knowing sin.
2. A purpose of Jesus becoming "fully human" was for us to experience spiritual life. The plan was to send Jesus was formed even before Adam sinned! God knew Adam was going to blow it. God had a plan in the works because He understood that we as humans would live forever and wanted to spend eternity with us.
3. The reason God gave us free-will is that in order to have an eternal love relationship, it has to be a free-will choice on both God's behalf and our behalf! We both have to choose to be with each other, if we want to share that love forever!
4. This does lead back to the verses. The idea is the "natural" man has to come first, so we can make the decision whether or not to choose God and be with Him forever.

Verse 50: "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."

1. Paul's point in Verse 50 is that human "flesh and blood" cannot inherit eternal life. The idea is that our bodies are designed for this atmosphere. Unless God changes us after we die, our physical bodies are not suited for the next life.
2. Remember that God only spends eternity with those who want to spend eternity with Him! Eternal love is "two-way" and both parties must agree to the deal. This is why those who refuse to accept Jesus payment for our sins are ineligible for heaven.
3. OK, what about those who die young and those who never heard of Jesus? Again, a "fair" God will judge people fairly.

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Verse 51: "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed –"

1. When Paul says "mystery", it means something that is a secret "until right now". Whatever Paul is describing as a "mystery" will no longer be a mystery as Paul will explain what it means.
2. Paul says, "We will not all sleep". The key word is "all". In other words, some Christians will not experience death the same way all of us die at some point.
 - a. Paul is talking about the concept of the "rapture of the church". The idea is that when Jesus comes back the Second Time, there will be some Christians alive at that time. Such Christians who are alive at that time will immediately go to heaven and no longer live on this earth. Those Christians living at that time get "raptured" to heaven.
 - b. Christians are to live with the expectation that Jesus could return at any moment. It is designed to keep us on our toes. Only God knows the actual day. (See Matthew 24:36)
 - c. Think about it this way: Do you believe heaven is finite or infinite in terms of population? I'll argue it is "finite". That means there has to be a final person admitted before God closes the door. That's what Jesus' return is all about: A wrap up of life as we know it.
3. What about Christians who have already died before that event? I believe heaven has "no time". When we go to heaven, we are no longer bound by the constraints of time. My view is I will enter heaven at the same time as my late father who was saved and at the same time as my wife and children who are saved. The rapture from an "earthly" perspective is a future date in time.

Verse 52: "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

1. The idea that the people living at the time of Jesus return will "instantaneously" be transferred from our human bodies into "heavenly" bodies. It will happen as fast as an "eye blink".
2. This is where the term "rapture of the church" comes from. The word "rapture" is not in the bible. It is based on a Latin word used to describe the "instant transfer" into "heavenly based people".
3. When "is" this event?
 - a. Revelation Chapter 20 speaks of a 1,000 year period where we rule and reign with Jesus on earth. During this period, Jesus rules over those who survive a 7-year "tribulation". Some Christians argue that the actual rapture occurs prior to the seven-year "tribulation" beginning. Other Christians argue that the rapture happens at the end of the 7-year tribulation at the same time as when Jesus comes back.
 - b. Those who argue the rapture is at the end of the seven-year tribulation point to these verses and say in effect, "These verses don't mention the seven year tribulation and only say in effect that Jesus comes once and that's it". Given that fact, they argue that the rapture of the church is after the seven-year tribulation.
 - c. Those of us who argue the rapture of the church occurs prior to the seven-year tribulation draw our conclusions from studying a lot of Old and New Testament scriptures. We see Jesus Second Coming for His church as a separate event from Jesus coming to rule and reign during the 1,000 year millennium.
 - d. Those who argue that Jesus must come after the 7-year tribulation like to ask the question, "Where does it say in the bible that Jesus comes twice, once to gather the believers (i.e., the "rapture" of the church) and once again to rule and reign in the millennium?"
 - e. My answer is to say, "Where in the Old Testament does it say the Messiah will come two times? No place in the Old Testament says the Messiah will come two times. By studying the bible one has to come to the conclusion that either 1) there are two Messiahs: One to suffer for our sins and one to rule over the earth or 2) The same Messiah comes twice. Using that same line of logic, I argue that the rapture happens prior to the 7-year period.

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Verse 53: "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (Verses 54 and 55 are quotes of Hosea 13:14.)

1. The point is that "death" as a concept loses to our victory in Jesus Christ!
2. Those souls who are Christians "clothe" themselves, i.e., get a new body that lasts forever. That is the idea of "imperishable".
3. Before I wrap up this chapter, notice what is not discussed: The fate of unbelievers. Don't get me wrong. Paul believes strongly in the existence of an eternal hell and states so in other places in the bible. The issue of the moment is what happens to Christians after we die and Paul stays focused on that issue.

Verse 56: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."

1. It is "sin" that causes us to die in the first place. It is only the forgiveness of Jesus that gets us to overcome the damage caused by sin.
2. The "power of sin is the law". God's laws are His standard for entering heaven. That does not change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Therefore the law is God's "power" of stating that we are condemned by sin. We are not forgiven for disobeying the law. We just accept Jesus' payment in our place for our sins of violating God's laws.
3. What about those who don't know God's laws? Part of the answer is that some of God's laws are "instinctive" in that we instinctively know murder and stealing is wrong. The bigger answer is God judge's people fairly based on what they do know!

Verse 57: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

1. Paul's conclusion is that we have "victory over death" through Jesus.
2. We as Christians don't have to face the "sting" of death.
3. The other issue of Verse 58 is once we accept Jesus while living on earth, we don't just "ignore Him thereafter" as if it's a "that's done, so what's next" situation.
 - a. To accept Jesus means to live out the rest of one's life doing what Jesus commands us to do and try to please Him in all that we do. Being saved is an instantaneous thing when we accept Jesus. Our job after we are saved is to help others enter the kingdom of heaven and help other believers grow in their faith and trust of God. That is "Christian living". Paul never says it is easy, but is emphasizing that all of this continual effort is "worth it".

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