

Lesson 22 (1 Corinthians 15:1-34)

I. Introduction

- A. Chapter 15 is my favorite chapter in the Bible. The all important doctrine of the bodily resurrection is explained with profound beauty and razor-sharp logic. When Handel set the resurrection to music in the Messiah, he came to this chapter for the libretto ("The trumpet shall sound.")
1. Despite all of the very weighty matters that Paul has considered in this letter, I believe he saved the most important for last. How important was the resurrection to Paul? When he preached to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens they thought he was preaching two new Gods: Jesus and Anastasis (Greek for resurrection). (See Acts 17:18.)
- B. To the world the opposite of faith is reason.
1. But what does God tell us about the opposite of faith? According to the Bible, faith is contrasted with sight -- not with reason. (2 Cor. 5:7). Nowhere are we told to abandon reason in favor of faith or to accept God's claims despite evidence to the contrary. God does not expect us to believe in him despite the evidence but because of the evidence.
 2. Our world of reason rejects the resurrection of Christ -- a position that has far reaching consequences as Paul is about to explain. But if our world of reason bothered to examine the evidence, it would find that reason is not on its side.
 3. The truth is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history that has more evidence behind it than many of the historical facts that are taught in our schools and colleges. The evidence of a literal resurrection is so overwhelming that the rationality should be questioned of one who fails to accept it rather than of one who accepts it as fact.
 4. "Other religions depend on subjective experience and blind faith, tradition, and opinion." Only Christianity stakes its claim to truthfulness based on historical events open to investigation.
 5. How weighty is the evidence for the resurrection? Well, one well known Jewish New Testament scholar (yes, they do exist - this one's name is Pinchas Lapide) has written that on the basis of the evidence he is convinced that God raised Jesus from the dead. He does not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, yet he feels that the weight of the evidence is so strong, he does believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.
 6. What would cause such a person to believe in the resurrection? As Luke

wrote in Acts 1:3, the resurrection is supported by "many infallible proofs."

- C. Secular scientists and historians are not the only ones who have rejected the resurrection. Liberal theologians have followed their lead.
1. Karl Barth said that he valued the doctrine of the resurrection but did not consider it to be an event in history. He said, "The resurrection touches history as a tangent touches a circle - that is, without really touching it." (Apparently, Karl knew as much about geometry as he did about the Bible.)
 2. Rudolf Bultmann felt that modern men could not be expected to believe in miracles before becoming Christians. Thus, he felt that the miraculous must be demythologized to reveal the true Christian message. He said that the resurrection was a call to "authentic existence in the face of death." Bultmann said that if the bones of Jesus were discovered in Palestine tomorrow then all of the essentials of Christianity would remain unchanged.
- D. The resurrection is and always has been the foundation of all preaching about Christ. It is the keystone that integrates the incarnation and Christ's atoning death. If it is removed, the whole gospel will collapse. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then all humans -- including all Christians -- remain under the tyranny of sin and death, and their bouts of doubt and despair are fully justified. The resurrection is non-negotiable and cannot be jettisoned without gutting the Christian faith.

II. Verses 1-11

- A. ¹ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: ⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet 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 which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. ¹¹ Therefore whether *it were* I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.
- B. Verses 1-2 tell us that the gospel had been preached to the Corinthians, that they had received the gospel, that they were standing in the gospel, and that they were being saved (present tense in the Greek) by the gospel if they kept it in their memory.

1. The dividing point between our old life in the world and our new life in Christ is baptism, but baptism is not the end of the story. Instead, our new birth at our baptism is the beginning of our story in the spirit just as our physical birth was the beginning of our story in the flesh.
 2. The Corinthians were *being saved* by the gospel. Salvation is a process that continues throughout our lives, and it requires faithfulness on our part. God's spiritual blessings are reserved for the faithful, and that is true under the New Covenant just as it was under the Old Covenant.
- C. Some see a contradiction between verse 3 ("For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received...") and Galatians 1:11-12.
1. Galatians 1:11-12 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 2. In verse 3, Paul is speaking only about the facts surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul does not appear to have been an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry, and these facts had been relayed to him by those who were eyewitnesses. His early mission partners, Barnabas and Silas, came from the church in Jerusalem, and we also know he spent time with Peter.
 3. In Galatians, the focus is not on the historical facts on which the gospel is based, but is instead on the interpretation of what those facts mean -- that through those events God was acting to saved all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, apart from the Law and human performance. Paul received that information through a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.
- D. Verse 3 tells us that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and verse 4 tells us that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.
1. Christ's atoning death is a central tenet of the faith.
 - a) Romans 5:6-8 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 - b) 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.
 - c) Galatians 1:3-4 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he

might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

2. This was not something that was a part of the Jewish understanding about the Messiah even though it was very clearly proclaimed by the Old Testament scriptures.
 - a) Acts 2:22-23 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: 23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.
 - b) Isaiah 53:8-10 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
 - c) Psalm 22:14-16 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. 16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.
 - d) 2 Corinthians 3:14-15 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.
3. Paul shifts from the aorist tense describing Christ's death to the perfect tense to describe Christ's resurrection -- not that Christ was raised, but that Christ has been raised. The resurrection of Christ is not something that belongs only to the past, but instead it has a continuing effect on present reality, as Paul is about to describe.
4. The resurrection on the third day also occurred according to the scriptures.
 - a) Psalm 16:10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
 - b) Hosea 6:2 After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us

up, and we shall live in his sight.

- c) Matthew 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

E. Not only did Christ die, but verse 4 reminds us that he was buried. Jesus was buried in a tomb, but on the third day that tomb was empty.

1. "No man has written, pro or con, on the subject of Christ's resurrection, without finding himself compelled to face the problem of the empty tomb. The fact that the tomb was empty on Sunday morning is recognized by everyone, no matter how radical a critic he may be; however anti-supernatural in all his personal convictions, he never dares to say that the body was still resting in the tomb."

2. In fact, the earliest Jewish attack on the resurrection of Christ presupposes the empty tomb.

a) Matthew 28:11-15 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' 14 "And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

b) The earliest attempt by the Jews to discredit the resurrection assumed the FACT of the empty tomb. That tomb was empty, and that is a FACT that was known to everyone at that time!

F. In verses 5-8, Paul reviews the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. First Cephas, then the twelve, then over five hundred brethren at once, then James, then all of the apostles, and finally Paul himself.

1. How are "the twelve" in verse 5 different, if at all, from "all of the apostles" in verse 7.

a) "The Twelve" must be used here as a title because at this time there were only 11 apostles living, and one (Thomas) was not present at the earliest appearances. The Twelve is likely a title for the group of apostles who were with Jesus from the beginning.

b) We know that the circle of apostles grew in size after the ascension, and so the phrase in verse 7 may include these others. It is also possible that the two phrases have the exact same group in mind, and that Paul lists

them twice to refer first to the early appearances and then to the ascension appearance.

2. Why in verse 6 does Paul mention that some of the 500 witnesses have fallen sleep, that is, have died?
 - a) He certainly may be indicating that some of these 500 witnesses have not died, and thus are available to be consulted should anyone want to investigate their account. But Paul gives no names, and he specifically indicates that some have died, rather than indicating that some are still alive. The emphasis is on those who have died. Why?
 - b) There can be no resurrection apart from death. Also, the notion of sleep carries with in the expectation of awakening to a new day. By using the figure of sleep, Paul was affirming that death was not a permanent condition.
3. Verse 7 tells us that Jesus appeared to James.
 - a) No record of this appearance to James, the Lord's younger brother, is given anywhere else in the New Testament, but even without this verse we would know that such an appearance must have occurred.
 - b) Why? Because neither James nor Jesus' other brothers believed in him during his life. Jesus' comments to Mary and John at the cross suggest that James did not even then believe. Jesus' brothers did not believe he was the Messiah or even a prophet. Yet they suddenly appear in the upper room in Acts 1:14.
 - c) The next mention of James is found in Acts 12:17 when Peter gets out of prison and says "Go tell this to James." In Galatians 1:19 Paul says that he met with two people after his conversion - Peter and James. In fact, in Galatians 1:19 Paul implies that James was considered an apostle! (From Acts 1:22 we know that an apostle had to have witnessed the resurrected Christ.) When Paul visited the Jerusalem church 14 years later he said there were three pillars in the church: Peter, John, and James (Gal 2:9). Finally in Acts 21:18 James appears to have been the apostolic leader of the Jerusalem church. Josephus tells us that James was stoned to death in AD 60.
 - d) HOW CAN THIS BE EXPLAINED? Why did James' opinion of Jesus change so suddenly? The only possible answer is that Jesus appeared to James! Even skeptical critics have acknowledged that the conversion of James is one of the surest proofs of the resurrection of Christ.
 - e) Jesus' appearance to James and his appearance to Paul have something in common. They were the only known post-resurrection appearances to

unbelievers, and both appearance had a very dramatic effect.

4. Verse 8 tells us that Christ's appearance to Paul was "last of all."
 - a) Paul is listing the resurrection appearances in chronological order, with the final appearance being to Paul himself. That post-resurrection appearance was the last of all.
 - b) But what about John? Didn't he see the risen Lord on Patmos? There are two possible explanations.
 - (1) First, while John did see Jesus on Patmos, John had already seen Jesus following his resurrection, and so that appearance might not have been considered a new appearance.
 - (2) Second, John may have seen Jesus only in a vision rather than actually seeing the risen Lord. But doesn't Paul describe his meeting with Christ as a "heavenly vision" in Acts 26:19? Yes, but his vision involved his eyes, as evidenced by the blindness that followed. John's visions came to him as he was "in the Spirit." (Rev. 1:10)
 - c) But while there will be no more limited post-resurrection appearances, that does not mean there will be no more appearances. Jesus will appear again on the last day when he comes to judge the world.
 - (1) Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.
- G. The term Paul uses in verse 8 to describe his own experience refers to a fetus expelled from the womb before being fully formed, whether it lives or not. Why does Paul use such a term?
 1. Compared to the other apostles who had accompanied Jesus during his earthly ministry, Paul had been born without a due period of gestation.
 2. Another possibility comes from his statement in Galatians 1:15 ("But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.").
 - a) Paul may have considered himself as one untimely born in the sense that God's purpose for his life, established in the womb, had up until that time been miscarried or aborted. The appearance of Christ put him on the right track and made him what God had always intended him to be.
- H. In verse 9, Paul says that he is the least of the apostles, and not even fit to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God.

1. Doing what he thought was pleasing to God turned out to be the source of his greatest guilt. Is sincerity alone enough? No. Just ask Paul.
 2. Paul may have thought he was not fit to be called an apostle, but he was an apostle -- by God's choice and by God's grace.
 3. That event on the road to Damascus is reflected throughout Paul's epistles. God was gracious to him when he was God's enemy, and in like manner God was gracious to all men while they were yet sinners.
 - a) Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 4. Also, Paul's unnatural outsider status as an apostle could be compared with the Gentiles' status with regard to Israel, and perhaps Paul had his own situation in mind in Romans 11.
 - a) Romans 11:24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?
- I. In verse 10, Paul hints at his success as a missionary by asserting that the grace shown to him was not without its intended effect.
1. But Paul does not believe he is repaying that divine grace. In Romans 5:15, Paul describes that grace as a free gift. It cannot be repaid as one would repay a loan.
 2. One commentator compared a Christian's response to God's grace to that of a child who joyfully gives a parent a birthday present after having spent the parent's own money to buy it!

III. Verses 12-19

- A. ¹² Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: ¹⁴ And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain. ¹⁵ Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷ And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸ Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.
- B. Paul expresses his astonishment in verse 12 with the phrase "how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

1. In verses 1 and 11 Paul confirmed that the Corinthians, or at least most of them, believed that Jesus was raised from the dead. So Paul is either addressing a minority who rejected that teaching or he is addressing another minority that rejected something else. In either case, the language suggests that this view was held by a faction and not by the entire group.
2. But what teaching was this faction denying?
 - a) Some argue that they denied the existence of any post-mortal life at all.
 - (1) The Epicureans believed that the soul could no longer exist after the death of the body. This group was mentioned in Acts 17:18-21, 32 as having been in Athens and having scoffed at Paul's teaching about the resurrection. (Athens is about 50 miles from Corinth.)
 - (2) The belief of the ancients, both Greek and Roman, in immortality was not widespread, nor clear, nor strong. The tombstone inscription "I was not. I was. I am not. I am free from wishes." was so common that it was abbreviated on grave markers much like RIP is used today as an abbreviation for Rest In Peace.
 - (3) Such fatalism led people then (as it does now) to go for the gusto. As verse 32 of this very chapter will describe it, their attitude was "eat, drink, and be merry."
 - (4) They yearned for salvation, but to them salvation had only to do with matters of this life and present benefits: health, wealth, protection, sustenance. Again, that limited viewpoint remains common even today.
 - (5) Christianity offered a promise of resurrection, a promise not truly offered elsewhere. As hard as it is to imagine, there may have been some Corinthian Christians who were rejecting the existence of any life beyond the present. It is not hard to imagine Christians living as if there were no future life, but it is hard to imagine that they would actually argue in support of such a position.
 - b) Others argue that this Corinthian faction had an "overrealized eschatology."
 - (1) That is, they believed that the resurrection had already occurred, and that it was a spiritual resurrection rather than a bodily resurrection. Paul addressed this heresy in 2 Timothy 2:16-18.
 - (a) 2 Timothy 2:16-18 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

2. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. And if Christ was not raised from the dead, then everything that is based on that fact collapses into a heap of broken dreams. The gospel would be emptied of its content and power; it would become devoid of any spiritual value. It would become bogus and worthless.
- a) Everything stands or falls on the truthfulness of the assertion that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. If that is false, then Christianity is nothing but a joke --- and the joke is on us.
 - b) Christianity rests on the truthfulness of a historical event that is open to investigation by the world. If that event did not occur, then the apostles and prophets were liars, with Jesus himself being either a liar or a lunatic. Death would still be reigning supreme with no one able to defeat it.
 - c) If Christ is not raised then we are still in our sins. Notice that Paul does not say that if Christ had not died we would still be in our sins --- even though that is certainly true. But even with the atoning death of Christ, we would still be in our sins absent the resurrection of Christ. Why?
 - (1) Because if the dead are not raised, then Christ is not coming back. And if Christ is not coming back, then the gospel is based on a lie and is emptied of its power to save. Because if the dead are not raised, then everyone will pay the wages of the sin without regard to whether they believe in Jesus Christ. Because if Christ is not raised, then there is no one interceding on our behalf. We have no savior and we have no hope.
 - (2) Romans 4:24-25 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.
 - d) If Christ is not raised then those who have died will remain forever in the clutches of death. They have perished and are no different from those who died outside of Christ. Absent the resurrection, the inescapable conclusion is that God abandons the faithful when they die. Absent the resurrection, we have no hope.
 - (1) 1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
 - e) Verse 19 comes straight to the point: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."
 - (1) The word "only" could apply to "this life" (if only for this life we have hope) or

to "setting one's hope" (if in this life we have set our hope only in Christ). A third and likely better option is to apply it to the entire clause (if in this life we have hoped in Christ -- that and nothing more). This third option is supported by the location of the word "only" in the Greek at the very end of the clause.

- (2) If the dead are not raised, then Christians are placing their hope in someone who is dead. If the dead are not raised, then the world is right -- the cross is utter foolishness.
- (3) Christian joy is based on our confidence that Christ is alive, that he will return, that the dead will be raised, that all wrongs will be made right, and that the faithful will join him in the sky to return to their heavenly home. If that is not true, then our joy is replaced by despair.

IV. Verses 20-28

- A. ²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. ²⁴ Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. ²⁷ For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under *him*, *it is* manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. ²⁸ And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.
- B. Paul uses the phrase "but now" elsewhere, and each time it is followed by a profound statement about the gospel.
 1. Romans 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 1 Corinthians 12:18; 13:13.
 2. Paul's use of the phrase here is no exception -- But now is Christ risen from the dead. This part of his argument begins with a premise that is true. A resurrection of the dead has already occurred. Those who were doubting the resurrection were doubting a historical fact. The resurrection of the dead was not simply a future promise; it had already happened when Jesus was raised from the dead. Our hope is not just based on a promise; it is based on a fact.
- C. Christ is the first fruits of them that slept. What does that mean?
 1. Verse 23 tells us it carries some notion of chronological order: "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."
 2. But it denotes more than mere chronology. The phrase "firstborn from the

dead" appears in Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5, and there it refers not only to chronological precedence but also to Christ's rank.

3. Jesus' resurrection was the "first of a kind, involving the rest in its character or destiny." That is why Paul says that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep rather than the first fruits of the resurrected. His resurrection was the beginning of God's renewal of all things. His resurrection was a pledge of the full harvest that will come.
- D.** In verses 21-22, Paul shows that Christ's resurrection was not just an isolated event, but was rather an event that has consequences for all who have followed and all who will follow. And he shows this by comparing Christ with Adam, which he also did in Romans 5.
1. Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.
 2. Christ's resurrection had a universal effect on all who came after just as Adam's sin had a universal effect on all who came after. As physical death came from Adam's sin, physical resurrection comes from Christ's resurrection.
 3. Note also that in verse 21 Paul uses the phrase "by man" or "through a man" to refer to Adam and to Christ. That detail in his argument prevents anyone from arguing that Christ as a divine figure was untouchable by death. It foils the argument that his resurrection was of a different order because he was divine. Jesus is God, but his death was the death of a man, and his resurrection was the resurrection of a man.
 - a) Hebrews 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
 4. Just as Adam led the way and represents the old order, Jesus leads the way and represents the new order.
- E.** We should note that Paul is speaking in these verses, not of the resurrection of all men, but of the resurrection of the faithful.
1. In verse 22, he says that in Christ shall all be made alive. The "all" he has in mind is explained in the next verse -- they that are Christ's at his coming.
 2. Paul sometimes uses the word resurrection to refer only to the resurrection of the faithful, which in a sense is the only true resurrection because it is that

group that is raised to eternal life.

- a) Philippians 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.
3. But we know from elsewhere in the Bible that all will be raised, but that some will be raised to eternal punishment rather than eternal life.
 - a) 2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.
- F. In verse 24, we see Jesus at the end delivering up the kingdom to God when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.
 1. Since death is named as the last of these powers, it is likely that these authorities and powers are powers from the spiritual world. These enemies of God all take the side of death. They all challenge the lordship of Christ and must be overcome. The verb translated "put down" is best translated here as dethrone, abolish, or overthrow.
 2. Despite what countless premillennial preachers have taught, Paul tells us in verse 24 that Jesus is not returning to set up a kingdom.
 3. Instead, we are told here that the kingdom of Christ that began soon after his resurrection will experience a transition at the final resurrection. At that time, the eternal kingdom will be delivered to God.
 4. Notice that verse 25 tells us that Jesus is reigning now - not that he will start to reign at some point in the future. When the eternal kingdom is delivered to God, Jesus will cease to reign as the Messiah, and he will start to reign instead as part of the Godhead ("that God may be all in all").
 5. When Jesus comes again it will not be to set up a kingdom, but instead will be to deliver up or hand over to God an already existing kingdom. Jesus already has an eternal kingdom -- one purchased with his own blood -- he does not need to set up another one.
- G. In verses 25-28, we meet the last enemy -- death.
 1. The writer of Hebrews described mankind's relation with death:
 - a) Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong

slavery.

2. Paul personifies death as a cosmic power that entered into the world through Adam and that reigns over everyone.
 - a) Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.
3. And yet not even death can separate us from the love of God.
 - a) Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
4. The victory belongs to God, who raises the dead. It is at that moment that death will be swallowed up in victory. It is at that moment that death will be defeated forever.
5. Under the various premillennial theories, a thousand year reign of Christ on earth will occur between the resurrection of the dead and the defeat of this last enemy, death. But that would transfer the climax of this section from the resurrection of the dead (which is the theme of the entire chapter) to a subsequent act of Christ that is not identified. If this defeat of death does not occur at the resurrection, then when does it occur? The defeat of death occurs at the resurrection of the dead; the two are one and the same. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then death will forever remain unconquered --- and that is precisely Paul's point in these verses.
6. The present infinitive in verse 25 means "to continue to reign." Christ reigns from the time of his resurrection until the time of our resurrection, when he will have defeated that great last enemy of his people, death. Christ is reigning now (despite the songs we sometimes sing that suggest he is not reigning now).
7. And once the kingdom is delivered, God will be all things in all. His reign will be unchallenged. Whoever denies the resurrection of the dead denies God's power over death and denies that God will reign over all things unchallenged.

V. Verses 29-34

- A. ²⁹ Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? ³⁰ And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³² If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. ³³ Be not deceived: evil

communications corrupt good manners. ³⁴ Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame.

B. What shall they do which are baptized for the dead?

1. As one commentator noted, "the ingenuity of the exegetes has run riot" in trying to explain that verse.
2. While the argument is clear, the specifics are not. The argument is that, whatever this practice involved, it would make no sense if there were no resurrection of the dead. But Paul does not tell us what the practice itself involved.
3. There are three popular viewpoints, two of which I believe we can consider as possible explanations.
 - a) The viewpoint I think we must reject is the one that is most popular among commentators -- that Paul is referring to some kind of vicarious baptism for dead persons.
 - (1) The Mormons today have such practice, and they point to this verse for support. But even if that is what Paul had in mind, he does not endorse the practice, but rather he simply refers to it. If the Mormons baptized for the dead and rejected the resurrection, Paul could ask them this very same question -- not to endorse the practice -- but rather to point out their inconsistencies.
 - (2) The use of the third person here is interesting. What will they do? Why are they being baptized? Paul used the second person in verse 12: "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Is the group in verse 29 the same group he addressed in verse 12? Or was the practice in verse 29 carried out by an even smaller group who might not even be expected to read this letter? And if so, why would this argument carry any weight with the others?
 - (3) Those are all good questions, but I think in the end we must reject this view because I find it inconceivable that Paul could pass over this point so quickly if Christians in Corinth were actually being baptized vicariously for dead people. Such a practice would strike at the very heart of the gospel and is contrary to all that Bible says about our personal responsibility to hear and obey the gospel.
 - b) The second viewpoint is probably the most popular one in the church -- that Paul is referring to those who are being baptized with the view toward be reunited with their departed loved ones in Heaven.
 - (1) Under this view, the Greek preposition "hyper" does not mean "in place of" or "for the benefit of" but instead means "with a view toward" or "for the sake

of."

- (2) Some commentators argue this view places too great a burden on that preposition, but the view has the advantages of making perfect sense with Paul's argument and coinciding with our personal experiences with people who have been converted following the death of a loved one. Why would they do that if the loved one will never be raised?
- c)** The third viewpoint is that the term "dead" in this verse is a metaphor for the condition of believers prior to their baptism. They are, in effect, dead bodies being buried in the waters of baptism, which is how Paul describes the situation in Romans 6.
- (1) Under this view, a paraphrase of verse 29 might be "Otherwise what do those hope to achieve who are baptized for their dying bodies?"
 - (2) This view has several advantages:
 - (a) First, it was the unanimous view of the so-called early church fathers.
 - (b) Second, it explains the use of the third person because Paul is referring grammatically to those who are being baptized.
 - (c) Third, it fits in well with Paul's other writings on the subject. See, for example, Romans 6:3-14, Ephesians 2:1, 5, and Colossians 2:13. Note also Romans 8:10 ("And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.")
 - (d) Fourth, it fits the context. We share in Christ's death at our baptism so that we can first be raised a new creature from the waters of baptism and later be raised from the dead on the last day.
 - (3) Baptism assumes death and resurrection. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then baptism becomes a pointless rite that falsely represents something that will not happen.

C. In verses 30-34, Paul appeals to his own life as a basis for his argument.

1. His hardships testify that death remained a dark and menacing foe. As we know from his descriptions elsewhere, Paul could well say that he died daily in his service for Jesus. That phrase could be translated "from day to day, I court death." Paul willingly identified with the death of Christ, and he did so almost literally many times prior to his actual martyrdom. If there were no resurrection of the dead, then Paul would be foolishly risking his own life for nothing.
2. If there is nothing more than life on this earth, why suffer voluntarily? Why not just pursue sensual pleasures instead? Why not live with the motto in

verse 32 --- let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die?

- a)** Resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means a hopeless end --- and hopelessness breeds dissipation. Take away the resurrection and moral standards collapse. A cynical fatalism toward life encourages people to go for the gusto, to have it all now, to amuse themselves endlessly. If life ends at death, why not live it up?
- b)** Paul tells the Corinthians that "bad company ruins good morals." This bad company must be the ones who were reveling in worldly pleasures because of their denial of the resurrection.
- c)** Verse 34 goes right to the point: "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame." While they should have been teaching others about God, they were instead asleep in a drunken stupor --- another very modern malady, I am sad to report.