

# Resurrection: The Center of the Gospel

## 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

**BI: The resurrection is not just significant; It is the sum and substance of all that Christianity is.**

Whether you know it or not, there are reasons for why you live the way you live. There are certain presuppositions that shape your thinking, drive your ambitions, and keep you on a certain course of life. We call this a worldview.

Everyone has a worldview. A worldview is simply the lens through which you see and interpret the world around you. For example, the reason Amish people live so differently than non-Amish people is because they have embraced a particular worldview. The cannibals of the New Hebrides Islands embraced a worldview that was quite different than the English missionaries who visited them with the gospel. The English missionaries held to a worldview that was significantly different from the one embraced by the unbelieving sailors who transported them to their respective fields of service.

You have a world view too. Whether you know it or not, there is within your heart a set of ideas and philosophies you believe are true that shape and motivate your life. Collectively, they are the lens by which you view and interpret the world around you.

So what's your worldview? How do you view life, people, politics, money, suffering, and the universe? How do you interpret sickness, health, speeding tickets, Christmas bonuses, and difficult responsibilities? If you are a Christian then the way you interpret the circumstances of life is quite different from the non-Christian people you live near, go to school or work with. That's because you get your worldview from God's written word, the Bible. It is for us, everything we need for life and godliness. It is the truth by which we interpret everything that intersects our lives.

If you are a child of God, let me ask you a question. What is at the core of the Christian worldview? Boil it down to its irreducible minimum and what do you have? Answer: at the heart of the Christian worldview is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And at the heart of the gospel is Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of the Christian's worldview because it is the heart of Christianity. This is what's on Paul's mind as he writes 1 Cor. 15.

Now we need to understand that the world the Corinthians lived in was quite different than our own. Corinth was right in the middle of ancient Greece, that bastion of philosophical thought and esoteric ideologies. This was the land of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. The Greek philosophers, believed that an immortal soul inhabited a body and that at death the soul left its bodily prison and soared upward to the divine spirit (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

To the first-century pagan mind the immortality of the soul was unquestionable. The resurrection of the body, however, was absurd to them. You may remember an example of this from Acts 17. Paul was in Athens seeking to plant a church there. He would go to the market place every day to reason with people in hopes of bringing some to faith in Christ. On one

occasion there were some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who were intrigued by his teaching about Jesus and the resurrection, so they took him to the Areopagus

So Paul went with them and preached taking his cue from the monument he saw which was a tribute to the “Unknown God.” Starting with the creation, Paul preached the gospel. But when he got to the part about the resurrection of Jesus, they sneered and ended his presentation. They just had no place in their worldview for bodily resurrection.

Amazingly, some in Corinth had brought that popular philosophical thinking into the church. That’s why Paul has to ask (1 Cor. 15:12), “how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” You see, they didn't get the fact that rejecting bodily resurrection sabotages the Christian worldview that they claimed to embrace. Like many of us, they liked the idea of Jesus paying for their sins, and they even believed that He rose from the dead. They just didn’t connect the dots from the resurrection of Christ to their own resurrection and the practical implications it imposes on daily living. Their perspective was this: since the body only lasts until death, (v. 32) let’s “eat, and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

This kind of thinking is contrary to the gospel. It suggests that how a Christian lives in this life is of little consequence, and having the assurance of immortality is really the only thing that matters. The most important doctrine to them was eternal security. But personal holiness and a life lived for the furtherance of the kingdom and the glory of God in the body were not even on the radar.

What the Corinthians needed was a reminder of where the gospel takes a man when he receives the saving grace of God. They needed to learn that *with* true salvation comes a new heart that longs to live in a manner worthy of its calling. The love that it has for Christ and the gratitude that wells up within such a heart produces a faith that strives for holiness and fruitfulness as it looks to the resurrection.

Watch Paul’s flow of thought here. In verses 1-2 he speaks of the gospel and how he fears that some of them had believed in it vain. In other words, they had made a profession of faith which bore no fruit.

Later Paul contrasts their faith with his own (10) when he says that the grace of God had *NOT* come to him in vain. The proof: “I worked harder than any of them [the other apostles], though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in me.” In other words, Paul wants us to know that the motivation and power to work for the glory of God in practical ways came not from himself, but from the grace of God which was poured out on him through the gospel.

And how does the gospel energize us to bear fruit and live to the glory of God now? Well, it gives us a new heart with new desires and ambitions. It also gives new power by the Spirit to fulfill those holy desires. But also, it brings with it new promises. And the greatest of these promises is the promises future resurrection. It promises that one day we will be rewarded for how we lived out the gospel in this life. In fact, you will remember back in 3:12-15 how Paul likens that day to a time when all our works will be cast into the fire of God’s judgment, and everything we did for His glory in this life will be like gold, silver, and precious stones for which we will be duly rewarded. That’s what motivated Paul to live as he die.

This is the only thing that can explain his life. He says (19) that “If in Christ we have hoped *in this life only*, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Why? Because apart from the resurrection his life didn’t make any sense? Paul drives this home when he asks (30) “Why are

we in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup> What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts in Ephesus?" We're not sure what he was speaking of specifically here, but clearly his life was in jeopardy.

He was constantly the object of ridicule and scorn. Occasionally he suffered terrible persecution. How can you explain such a life? The only explanation is the gospel's promise of resurrection. And because he lived for the resurrection he was free from the meaningless pursuit of pleasure on the one hand, and the fear of death on the other (Read v. 26; 54-55).

Paul wasn't afraid to die. In his letter to the Philippians he said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." How could he say that? He could say it because when Jesus rose from the dead he conquered death for all who would believe. Resurrection is not secondary to the gospel. It is central! And it should have a profound effect upon the way we live.

So in Corinth we have on one hand the apostle Paul whose life of holiness, personal ministry, and sacrifice was producing an abundance of fruit to the glory of God, and on the other hand we have the Corinthians who were sitting around saying things like,

Isn't it great that Jesus makes our eternity secure?

Isn't it cool that brother Bob has such freedom in Christ that he can sleep with his father's wife without guilt?

I can't believe you follow a guy like Peter. Everybody knows Apollos is the better teacher. He's far more philosophical and relevant than Paul and Peter combined.

Man, if you don't give me back that money I loaned you, You're gonna hear from my lawyer.

You know, life was pretty lame until I started hanging out with the brothers from church drinking beer, smoking cigars and eating the forbidden temple food.

I'm glad I finally found some people who agree that God wouldn't want me to waste my life chained to such a rotten wife. After all, God wants me to be happy, right?

Man, you aint got any gift at all if you aint got the gift of tongues. It's the only one that matters. I'm just sayin!

Is it any wonder Paul would write what he did in v. 33-34? 'Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals.' Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."

It was time for the true believers in the church of Corinth to separate themselves from those who were teaching that there is no resurrection. Such men don't know God. To listen to them and follow their example of living is shameful. It's time to come back to the gospel. It's time to start living in a manner that shows the world what God is like. It's time to let the power of the gospel and its promise of resurrection have its rightful place in your life.

Oh, beloved, do we understand what the gospel did to Paul's life. It took that proud, ambitious, self-righteous, persecutor of the church and transformed him into a humble, self-sacrificing slave of Christ. Verse 9 reads, "I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace

toward me did not prove vain.”

In Philippians Paul tells us what his new ambition was. “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10–11).

The resurrection was not a secondary issue with Paul. It was central to his gospel, and it was the driving force in his heart that made him live in such an intentional, holy, loving and sacrificial way that it still bears fruit some 2000 years later.

What about you, beloved. If someone were to examine all your choices from the past year in an attempt to determine the core of your worldview, what would they conclude?

Perhaps we need to do some personal evaluation. What does the promise of revelation mean to your life? In light of the resurrection...

Some of us need to make some changes in the way we lead our families.

For some, there are people with whom you have been at odds and you need to pursue reconciliation.

For you it may mean beginning to address a stubborn habit.

Perhaps it's that God wants you to begin addressing some secret sin that has held you captive for years.

Maybe there is someone you know who needs to hear the gospel and you are the one God wants to us.

How does the promise of resurrection speak to the way you and I will live today.

**BI: The resurrection is not just significant; It is the sum and substance of all that Christianity is.**

You see, beloved, it is not as though Paul was not interested in a life that “gained” something good. He was no masochist. Rather, his worldview drove him to seek to profit in the realm that really counts; namely the kingdom of God. Rewards and pleasures there will be eternal!

Many of the Corinthians, however, did not share Paul’s perspective on life. Notice v. 32, “If the dead are not raised (which is exactly what they were saying), “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” In other words, let’s just live like everybody else. Let’s not concern ourselves about the lost. Let’s enjoy life to the fullest. Let’s just get a great job, and make a lot of money. Let’s buy a beach house for our summers, a mountain house our winters, and enjoy all the food and drink we can safely afford. That’s what everyone else does... or hopes to do. But not Paul. The grace of God was

Popular paganism argued that the senses surrounding the immortal soul were given by Nature but could not be enjoyed beyond the grave. So if they had the money ‘eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (32). How the Christian lived in this life was felt to be of little consequence, but having the assurance of immortality was seen to be the essence of the gospel and all that matters. This view of the Christian life still lives on and is not without its proponents both in the pulpit and pew. (Carson)

The Corinthians already believed in the resurrection of Christ. The proof of His resurrection was

1. Their salvation
2. The O.T. Scriptures
3. Christ was seen by many witnesses.

### **Key Scriptures:**

V. 3

**First Importance:** (protos) first. This passage became an early Christian Confession.

**Received:** learned from someone else.

**Scriptures:** (graphe) “writings”. Paul probably had in mind Isa. 53:10-12. “By O.T. prediction.” Such prophecies as Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:4–6; Dan. 9:26, 27; Hos. 6:2. Such **scripture-types** as Jonah (Mt. 12:4), as **Isaac**, who is expressly said by the apostle to have been *received from the dead in a figure*, Heb. 11:19. Note, It is a great confirmation of our faith of the gospel to see how it corresponds with ancient types and prophecies.

When Paul wrote “**according to the Scriptures**” (1 Cor. 15:3) he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Much of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ as our substitute and Saviour. The annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) and prophecies like Isaiah 53 would also come to mind. Paul also compared Christ’s resurrection to the “firstfruits,” and the firstfruits were presented to God on the day following the Sabbath after Passover (Lev. 23:9–14; 1 Cor. 15:23).

**Raised:** Isa. 53:53:10-12 The prophet explained that the son of David would come back from the grave to bring great blessings to God’s people. Paul also may have thought of Psalm 16:10, a passage in which David recorded that God would not allow his Holy One to see decay.

**V.5**

**Appeared to Cephas and to the Twelve:** This was in Galilee, Mt. 28:10. Peter was the first male witness, but we know that a number of women saw him first. Also as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw him and ate with him.

**Then to James and by the apostles when he was taken up into heaven:** This was on mount Olivet, Lu. 24:50. Compare Acts 1:2, 5–7. Notice too how he let one apostle, Thomas, handle Him to put away all doubt.

**V.6**

**Sleep:** dead

**V.8**

**Last:** eschatos: Seeing the resurrected Christ was a requirement for apostleship. (Acts 1:21–22). The Lord Jesus appeared to him by the way to Damascus, Acts 9:17. Paul was highly favored of the Lord in having a personal audience with Him after the resurrection, but he endeavored to keep a low opinion of Himself.

**Untimely born:** abnormal birth, miscarriage. Paul considered himself **abnormally born** because he lacked the “gestation” period of having been with Christ during His earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22). He was the “**runt**” of the litter.

**V.9**

**Least of:** least importance, smallest.

**V. 10**

**Vain:** empty

**Labored:** tired

**Grace:** We are nothing but what **God** makes us, nothing in religion but what his **grace** makes us. All that is good in us is a stream from this fountain.

V. 11

**So:** (οὕτως) in this manner

**We preach:** (κηρύσσω), announce, tell. All of the apostles agreed in this that Jesus Christ, and him crucified and slain, and then rising from the dead, was the very sum and substance of Christianity; and this all true Christians believe. All the apostles agreed in this testimony; all Christians agree in the belief of it. By this faith they live. In this faith they die.

The apostolic message was that the crucified Christ became the resurrected Christ,

**You believed:** trusted, Christian faith. This is the message that every true apostle taught and every true Christian believes.

## Key Terms

**Old Testament** Though not prominent, OT passages demonstrate belief in bodily resurrection. Prophets used the idea to express hope of national rebirth for Israel (Ezek. 37; Isa. 26:19). Psalm 16:10 views resurrection in a messianic framework; God will not abandon His “Holy One” to the grave. Believers may be confident facing death because God will not leave them destitute; He will “redeem” them from the grave and take them to Himself (Ps. 49:14–15). Death was not final; God would renew the body and the individual could “see God” (Job 19:26). Daniel 12:2 provides the clearest OT statement on resurrection: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (NIV). Both righteous and wicked will be resurrected. Thus eternal consequences are tied to actions and decisions made in life.

## Exegetical Outline

1 Corinthians 15:3–11

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

<sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit 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 toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. <sup>11</sup>

Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

[OBJ]

[OBJ]