

Discovering God's Wisdom

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 19 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Searching the Scriptures for hidden treasure

"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162

It's interesting when we realize that Paul began his letter to the Corinthians pointing them in the direction of the Cross; he finishes his letter by pointing them in the direction of His Resurrection! Both are central to the message which brings salvation. To reject the concept of resurrection was to reject the very message which had saved them and, in fact, was heresy!

First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

As we have been dealing with questions Paul is answering in response to questions posed by the Corinthians, we might now assume that the question has been raised as to whether or not there is a resurrection of the dead.

The central message of the Christian faith is the *gospel* or, in other words, *the Good News of Jesus Christ!* Paul begins his word to them on resurrection by "*declaring to them the gospel.*"

1. What 4 things does he say to them about the Gospel in verses 1-2?
 - a. What *is* the gospel message according to verses 3-4?
 - b. Why would it be necessary to hold fast to *this message* to be saved?
 - c. According to *this message*, are you really saved? Share what you believe.

2. Verses 5-8 give the *evidence* of Christ's resurrection: He died, He was buried, He rose again, and He was *seen*. Who saw the resurrected Christ?

verse 5

✓

✓

verse 6

✓

verse 7

✓

✓

verse 8

✓

Paul had seen the risen Christ with his own eyes! He not only saw Him, but Paul received the gospel message from Jesus Himself—“*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received...*”

3. After stating that Paul had seen Christ, last of all, Paul stopped for a moment to consider the ramifications of his last statement. What did he say? v. 9
 - a. Do you think Paul was saying here that he really wasn't an apostle? (You may see 2 Corinthians 11:5.) What was he communicating?
 - b. Was the grace God had shown toward Paul in vain? v. 10

Making It Personal...

Paul says, “*By the grace of God I am what I am...*” Paul had been a persecutor of the church. He was now a preacher of the greatest message ever given.

4. What does it mean to you to say, *by the grace of God I am what I am*?
 - a. Has His grace toward you been in vain? Share your thoughts on this.

Digging Deeper

- ❖ Notice the repetition of the phrase, *according to the Scriptures*, in verses 3-4. Why is this statement important? Can you think of any Scriptures which foretell the gospel message?

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Pearl of Great Price

“...Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NLT) This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

In verse 12, we have evidence that some of the Corinthians were, in fact, denying the resurrection of the dead. They weren't necessarily denying *Christ's* resurrection, specifically, but the fact that believers would be raised.

1. Starting in verse 13, Paul begins a series of *if* thoughts. Share briefly from the following verses what would be the case *if there was no resurrection from the dead*:

verse 13

verse 14

verse 15

verse 16

verse 17

verse 18

verse 19

2. According to Paul's thoughts, can you really be a Christian without believing in the Resurrection? (Why would our faith be futile if there is no resurrection of the dead?)
 - a. Why would it be true that the Corinthians would still be in their sins if Christ had not been raised?
3. Considering what you know about Paul's life and ministry, why do you think it might be that Paul said, "*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men*"?

Making It Personal...

4. Although there is, indeed, no better life than the life lived *in Christ*, we might be able to understand Paul's words in verse 19 better when we consider them in light of the following verses. Briefly state what each verse says, and then share your experience with at least one of them...
 - 2 Timothy 3:12
 - 1 Peter 4:12-13
 - Philippians 3:10

Digging Deeper

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

The NIV translates the beginning of verse 20 in this wonderful way: “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead*”! All that Paul shared in the “if” verses (verses 13-19) can be entirely disregarded, because Christ had indeed been raised—Paul had seen Him with his own eyes!

In verses 21-22, using Adam's sin and Christ's sacrifice, Paul paints the picture between death and life. The Life Application Bible Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians says, “*What we believe about this life and the afterlife depends on what Jesus did with death.*”

1. What was Adam's part in our death sentence?
verse 21
verse 22
 - a. What did Christ *do with death*?
verse 21
verse 22
2. Verse 23 gives the order of resurrections, and also provides the qualifier for those who will be *made alive* (verse 22). List the order of resurrections according to verse 23.
 - a. How does this verse qualify who will be *made alive*?
3. In verses 24-28 Paul gives a sort of overview of what will happen next. Share from these verses exactly what will take place.
verse 24-25
verse 26
verse 27-28

Alan Redpath says that these verses—in particular verses 24-25—are the “*greatest glimpse into the ultimate future that the Bible gives to us.*”

In verse 29, Paul comes back again to an “if” question. This time he speaks of the living being baptized for the dead. His question is, if the dead do not rise, or are not resurrected, why would men be baptized for them? He doesn't say anything about the practice—not condoning or condemning it—just that it is being done and that it makes no sense for them to do this, if they don't believe in resurrection.

Another “if” statement is implied in verse 30. We might begin the verse this way: *If Christ is not raised from the dead, why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?* In verse 31, Paul speaks of dying daily, and in verse 32 of fighting the wild beasts of Ephesus.

4. What is Paul communicating in these verses?
 - a. What is his conclusion? v. 32b
 - b. Do you understand what Paul is saying here?

5. In verses 33-34 Paul finishes this section with 3 strong words of exhortation. What are they?
 - ✓
 - ✓
 - ✓
 - a. From the context of the chapter so far, why do you think Paul is so strong with them here?

Making It Personal...

6. Because Christ has indeed been raised, and because He is the *first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep (verse 20), what does that imply about us?

There is a saying that goes this way: *Born once, die twice; born twice, die once.*

- a. From verse 22:
 - What happens to those who are only born into Adam?
 - What happens to those who are born, again, into Christ?

If you are only born into Adam, then your fate is death. If you have been born-again into Christ, then you will live! There is a choice to be made—and **you** must make it! Have you chosen life?

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”

Deuteronomy 30:19 NASB

Digging Deeper

- ❖ Tie this week’s memory verse (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NLT) with the heart of what Paul is saying in this chapter as a whole.

Fourth Day:

Deeper Discoveries

This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

Worthy (15:9) *"For I am not worthy to be called an apostle..."*

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? Mark 1:7; Luke 7:6; Luke 15:19

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Church of God (15:9) *"...I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."*

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? Galatians 1:13; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 3:15

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Fifth Day:

Heartsearch

Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.

Only by God's Grace

“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.” 1 Corinthians 15:9 NIV

Paul's title at one time could have been: *Public Enemy #1 of the Christian church!* As a zealous Pharisee, he was considered the enemy of all believers. Paul would later teach in his letters that all are unworthy, but he felt himself particularly unworthy because he had actively persecuted the church. He refers to it here as the *church of God*, and in so doing, reveals that he had persecuted God Himself. Acts 9:1-2 (NLT) tells us: *“Meanwhile, Saul [Paul] was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.”* It was precisely at this point, along the road to Damascus to complete his mission, that a bright light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon Paul and the Lord Jesus appeared to him. What followed was nothing short of God's grace in the unfolding of God's plan for His servant.

With true humility, Paul attributed all his hard work for the cause of Christ solely to God's grace (1 Corinthians 15:10). It was this grace that had saved him and enabled him to serve effectively. Paul's words serve as a reminder to us that each of us is saved from sin; each is given a gift by the measure of God's grace; and each of us is handed a great privilege along with the responsibility to serve.

1. Read through Romans 3:9-18, keeping in mind that we are each one unworthy before God.
 - a. What do you learn here about the state of the *human heart*?
 - b. What do you learn here about the state of *your heart* apart from Christ?
2. Try applying Paul's words by putting yourself into this loose paraphrase: *“For I am the least of all believers, and do not deserve to be called a believer, because I...* (Finish the rest of the sentence in your own words.)
3. Do you feel you have worked hard and accomplished much for God's kingdom?

- a. If so, what motivates you to serve Christ? Why is this important to you?

Though Paul was undoubtedly the most influential of the apostles, he was deeply humbled because God had poured on him such grace and kindness. True humility is not perceiving yourself as “worthless,” but rather recognizing *God’s worth in you*.

4. Spend the remainder of your study time today reading through Hebrews 11, which Christians commonly refer to as the “Hall of Faith.” There are many heroes mentioned here, some familiar, others perhaps not so familiar, but all of whom the Bible says, “*the world was not worthy.*” Think about the lives of these individuals, each of whom were transformed by God’s amazing grace.

- From your reading, what did you learn about the people God uses?

- What did you learn about God’s grace?

- What did you learn about yourself?

Heartsearch: Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week’s study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

Sixth Day:

Laying Up Treasure

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

I praise God for (an aspect of His marvelous character) _____

I confess to God that I _____

I thank God for _____

I am asking God _____

Praise for answered prayer: _____

People/things I want to pray for this coming week: _____

Pearl of Great Price: _____

Notes