

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Fourteen

1 Corinthians 15:29-58

Day One

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? 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."

v. 29 – This verse is a mystery. I have no idea what Paul was referring to, and have never seen anyone who could make sense of it. Of course the Mormons have taken this verse and developed a doctrine that you can identify your ancestry and be baptized on their behalf now, even though they are dead. This is a ludicrous application of a single verse that defies definition. Since there is no interpretation that is acceptable, we will pass over this verse without making any effort to make sense of it. There are plenty of other verses to apply and interpret without trying to force something in this instance.

v. 30 – Paul had put his life on the line to teach what he taught, as did the other apostles. Many use this as proof that what the apostles taught was true, for seldom would anyone risk or give their life for something that was a lie. Paul staked everything on the fact, the *fact* mind you, that the resurrection of Jesus and of the dead was a reality.

Paul was earnest about what he did and he faced danger on a regular basis. This required courage. Many have stated that courage isn't action in the *absence* of fear but in the *midst* of fear. I am always surprised by how many people won't go on a missions trip, for example, because they are afraid something will happen to them. I am not saying there isn't danger or that they should not be concerned. I am saying that their fear should not be the deciding factor as to whether they go or not.

I gave my life to Jesus 33 years ago—I didn't loan it to Him. If He chooses to claim my life in Africa or in my bed at home, that is His business, not mine. I will not make my decisions based on fear. At the same time, Paul always avoided or went around the danger if he could. But if he could not, then he stood his ground and did the work God called him to do.

v. 31 – Paul faced his danger on a daily basis, which meant he faced his own limitations and mortality. He faced death regularly and that was no exaggeration on his part. At the same time, Paul took great consolation and joy from his work of establishing the churches throughout the Gentile world. I take great joy in the work that I do and love telling people about my experiences and adventures in Africa and other places. I write

regularly for www.johnstanko.us, telling people about what I do. I suppose in some sense I glory in Jesus over my work.

Do you have any work in which you glory in Jesus? If not, why not? What is it that remains for you to do that you aren't doing? Is fear robbing you of the work you could do? What steps can you take to face and overcome your fear?

v. 32 – We aren't sure who the beasts in Ephesus were. Some believe they were Paul's opponents. Others have conjectured that Paul did face literal beasts in some gladiatorial-like contest as part of his persecution there. We will never know. But Paul argued that if there is no resurrection and this life is all that matters, then we may as well live it up, eating and drinking as we choose, since there are no eternal implications from our actions.

Day Two

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. 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.

v. 33 – Paul made the point that that bad doctrine has a way of corrupting the good. I used to have a friend who said that error is half way around the world before truth gets off the mark. That is so true. I have heard people repeat a bad or erroneous teaching they heard after only one audience, but then struggle to reiterate a basic truth they have heard taught over and over again. The lesson here is that you need to be careful about the company you keep, especially paying attention to their doctrine and opinions where the things of God are concerned.

As I write this, I am on a plane and happened to glance over at the newspaper the man next to me was reading. The headline of an article said, "What you don't know can hurt you." It is important what you believe about God and His word and what you don't know or understand can hinder your walk with Him. Therefore make some effort to understand your faith and what you believe.

v. 34 – You have to do some work where your faith and doctrine are concerned. I am just returning from the Christian Booksellers Convention and book sales are down significantly. People are reading less about their faith. Many of the best-selling books being read, on the other hand, are neither well-written nor theologically sound. Some are downright heretical! I am always surprised by the lack of discernment among Christians who have walked with the Lord for a number of years. An indication of this is the popularity of the best-selling rapture or end-time books.

What are you doing to help you understand your faith? Are you able to explain basic doctrines to other people? What are you reading? Is it building you up and entertaining you? Can you read something and judge whether it is biblical or not?

Is there a class you can take at your church or in your community that can help you better understand your faith or the Bible?

v. 35 – I would imagine these were questions that some posed to try and prove that there was or is no resurrection. They wanted answers and facts that would explain this doctrine and how the resurrection would take place. Of course, the only answer we have to these questions is the state of Jesus’ body when He was raised from the dead. We will discuss that in more detail later in this study.

v. 36 – Once again we see Paul’s rule not to simply state the truth but to explain the truth. He could have written, “There is a resurrection, trust me.” He could have said, “The Lord revealed this to me.” Instead he built a logical case that would have appealed to the Greek mindset of his audience. Paul started his explanation by referring to a basic truth of nature. Nothing grows without first dying. Jesus had referred to this same fact of nature when he said:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me (John 12:24-26).

Day Three

37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 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.

vs. 37&38 – Paul continued with his argument from nature, pointing out that the plant doesn’t resemble the seed it comes from. The seed’s “body” gives way to another, totally different body of the mature plant. Of course, he used this in the context of his discussion on resurrection. Like Jesus, Paul drew his analogies and lessons from all walks of life. That’s what made them both such effective teachers.

I have found that all good teachers are good observers of life around them. That is why I am writing so much for my blog, these studies and my *Monday Memo*. The writing forces me to be more observant, for I am always in need of material that will make my writing interesting and relevant.

How observant are you? Do you notice things and then examine them closely to see what you can learn? Or are you too busy to do that? What can you do to improve your observation skills? Do you even see that as important? What outlets do you have to apply the lessons learned from what you observe?

vs. 39&40 – Paul pointed out that there are major differences in the types of flesh among the animals and creatures on earth. There are also different kinds of splendor or distinctions among the heavenly bodies such as the moon and stars and earthly bodies such as mountains and rivers.

I have made an effort in the last few years to expand my reading to include such topics as history, geography, quantum physics and secular leadership books. I want to draw on a number of different genre and fields to teach the lessons I need to teach about purpose, productivity and faith. **What are you doing to expand your awareness and understanding to make you more effective in fulfilling your purpose?**

My wife recently started a jewelry business and has created a unique design that is becoming quite popular. She tells how she developed this style by means of her travels to Asia and Africa, studying the philosophies among the people there and her studies of creativity and Scripture. I think that's pretty neat and is an example of what I am talking about here.

Day Four

41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

v. 41 – Paul made one last reference to the differences that exist in nature among the celestial bodies—sun, moon and stars. Of course, Paul was not teaching an astronomy lesson. He was saying all this in the context of the resurrection, in response to questions of what kind of body would exist after the resurrection. I would think that some objected to the resurrection, being of the opinion common among Greeks at the time that flesh was wicked or useless. So why or how would God choose to perpetuate what was worthless in the form of human flesh, or so they could have reasoned? Paul was never ambivalent about creation, including the human body. It was a all part of God's creation and it was good—corrupted by sin, but still good in the fact that God created it.

v. 42 – Paul's lesson was that the present body and future body would differ in essence and splendor just like there is a difference among the flesh of the animal kingdom or the splendor of heavenly bodies. Paul was saying that you cannot understand the resurrected body in terms of what you already see or know about this pre-resurrection body.

Paul taught here that the resurrected body would be imperishable. It will last for all eternity. We know that Jesus' post-resurrection body was a body that could be touched, since He instructed Thomas to touch His wounds. We see that Jesus could eat after His resurrection and that He could pass through walls and closed doors. He could be present one moment and gone the next to another venue. He could communicate, had full recall

of His pre-resurrection life, yet was sufficiently different in appearance that people who knew Him well did not recognize Him in His post-resurrection state.

Jesus' post-resurrection traits give us some idea of what we will be like when we join Him in that state.

vs. 43&44 – Our resurrected body will be glorious, powerful and spiritual. This contrasts with our current state of weakness, sickness and limitation. Since there is a natural body, there will also be a spiritual body as a result of the resurrection. When you come to think of it, our new bodies will be quite something.

But when you think of it, our current bodies are pretty remarkable as well. Consider how our bodies can heal and renew themselves, how intricate the processes of digestion, breathing, waste removal and blood circulation. We are truly “fearfully and wonderfully made.” (see Psalm 139) So this remarkable body will become even more remarkable in its spiritual state after the resurrection. I can't wait to get my new body, can you? Well, I suppose that means I have to die first or at least be found numbered among God's people when He returns if I am still alive.

Day Five

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.

v. 45 – Remember that Paul was making a point about the difference between the first body and the resurrected body. So he assigned the first body to Adam but the resurrected body to Christ, whom he referred to as the last Adam. Christ was raised and now will raise all who are His to have a spiritual body just as He has.

It occurs to me that Jesus can do nothing except give life. There is no death in Him:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18).

It has always intrigued me that so many followers of Jesus condemn people when their Lord doesn't condemn people. I have noticed a tendency for people who know the Bible to be rather harsh on those who don't know it as well or at all. I hope you never give in to that tendency.

v. 46 – The resurrected or spiritual body comes after the natural. I have known some who apply this principle beyond the subject of resurrection. They say that if you are faithful in natural things, God will give you responsibility for spiritual things. I think we must be careful when we take verses out of the context for which they were presented. But I do think there is merit to this application:

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (Luke 16:10-12).

Are you cooperating with this principle, being faithful with natural things so you can inherit the spiritual? I hope you are.

v. 47 – There must be a difference between the natural and resurrected body. The source of the first is the dust of the earth. The source of the second one is heaven. You would expect there to be tremendous differences, although we cannot say for sure now what those differences will be (see verse 42 above for the characteristics of Jesus' resurrected body; which gives us some indication of what our bodies will be like).

v. 48 – Those who only follow in the footsteps of Adam will have only a natural body. Those who follow Christ will have a spiritual body. The natural body will decay but the spiritual body will live forever. The only hope for this natural body is resurrection.

v. 49 – Paul spent a few verses contrasting the traits of the natural body and the spiritual body. Each body inherits the characteristics of its source—the one source is Adam, the other is Christ.

Day Six

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 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. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

v. 50 – The kingdom of God is now and is yet to come in its fullness. This natural body I have cannot fully inherit the Kingdom, but I can begin to submit to God's government, bringing my natural body into submission to God's will in the power of the Spirit. But there is a limit to how far I can go with this. Ultimately, I will die and I will need a new body to inherit and inhabit the fullness of God's kingdom.

vs. 51-53 – A biblical mystery isn't something that is unsearchable or unknowable. It is something that was unknown that God has made known. The mystery here is that Christ

will return and, when He does, some will still be alive. When that happens, they won't be left out of the resurrection. They will be changed and have their resurrection body that the saints who have died before them will also receive.

I am not sure how Paul came into the certainty of this knowledge of the resurrection. There is little discussion of it in the Old Testament. That is why it is called a mystery, just like the conversion of the Gentiles. They are both something that God had intended all along, but they were hidden from sight and knowledge. Now God has made these mysteries known for all to see, and that is what Paul was proclaiming.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:26-27).

Don't be swayed by anyone who promises to reveal special mysteries to you about the things of God. There are not mysteries in the biblical sense of the word. There are many things we don't understand, including some of the verses we have looked at in this study. But those aren't mysteries according to the concept from which Paul worked.

I am not sure if there will be a literal trumpet. I'm not sure that's really important. What is important is that the end will come and those in Christ will be changed, inheriting a new body

Day Seven

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

v. 54 – Death is the last enemy that Christ will vanquish. He has already vanquished sin in the power of His blood. But when the end comes, there will be no more death. The curse that came on man in Genesis will be reversed, as God had promised it would.

v. 55 – The resurrection of which Jesus is the firstfruits will swallow up death. While I said that there wasn't much about resurrection in the Old Testament, here Paul quoted Isaiah:

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken (Isaiah 25:7-8).

The mystery revealed to Paul was that the fulfillment of this was in Jesus the Messiah, who would suffer, die and be raised from the dead. This is what God revealed to Paul as a mystery—that Christ would conquer death not just for Himself but for all who put their faith in Him. You can see why Paul had to address this error that there was no resurrection. For Paul, the whole promise of God to redeem His people is contained in the power of the resurrection.

v. 56 – Death’s power over man came from sin and the law made man aware of that sin. So without resurrection, the cycle of sin, death, and law, sin, death, and law could not be broken. The Corinthians had to see that the resurrection was the natural outworking of sin’s power being broken in Christ. Without the power of sin, there can be no death.

v. 57 – To which victory was Paul referring? The victory over sin and death, of course. And what is the response to this victory to be? Thanksgiving! I am repeatedly impressed with Paul’s absolute and singular focus on Jesus. It’s all about Him in all ways. We have the victory but *only* in Christ Jesus. There can be no doctrine, no focus or emphasis for Paul that can outshine or supersede Jesus.

Is your devotion and commitment that focused and singular? Is Christ your all in all? There were many times in my walk that things overshadowed the primacy and supremacy of Christ. I have repented of those things I was aware and have been working to make Jesus supreme in my writing, thinking and teaching.

v. 58 – I have quoted this verse on many occasions and used it in my own life as a source of encouragement. The context here is resurrection, so Paul urged those who were paying such a high price as disciples to be encouraged. They could endure because their labor wasn’t in vain. God was going to raise them up and they would live with Christ forever. Now that’s good news!

Have you been discouraged? Then you need to take this verse to heart today. You aren’t without hope. As Paul stated earlier in this chapter, if there is no resurrection, then we are to be pitied and should just live for today. That’s not the case, however. There is a resurrection and we will live with Him forever. So we can work, endure hardship, even persecution and death, because death has lost its power over us because of Jesus death and resurrection.

Because He is risen, I will live as well. Thanks be to God! Thanks be to Jesus Christ, my Lord! Amen.