

STUDY GUIDE



CHURCH NAME

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

DOES SCIENCE DISPROVE THE RESURRECTION? (PART 2)

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8

06/11/2017

MAIN POINT

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that He is God in the flesh and alone able to save us all.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best magic or illusion that you have ever seen?

Do you know how the trick works? If so, are you able to perform the trick?

In the Book of Corinthians, it's amazing how Paul deals with those in the Church who deny their own bodily resurrection by first establishing the historical reliability of Jesus' resurrection. Paul simply reminds them of Jesus. He does this in order to lay a firm foundation for his argument. Christ's resurrection actually happened. And the truth is grounded in eyewitness testimony (vv. 4–8). These witnesses were still alive when Paul wrote scripture and were therefore able to give firsthand testimony to the truth. If Jesus can get out of the grave, then all the other miracles are easy. Miracles are possible for us too! That's the message of the gospel. The gospel is not only something we embrace at the beginning of the Christian life but the source of strength throughout the Christian life. It is remarkable that Paul sees a need to "remind" the Corinthians—already believers! — of the gospel. Evidently, the gospel message is not only for evangelism but also for discipleship; not only for unbelievers, but also for believers.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4.

What is Paul reminding the Corinthians about? Why is this such an important thing to remember?

A chief purpose of 1 Corinthians was to answer questions and challenges from the Corinthian church. None were more pivotal than their questions about resurrection. Paul's presentation of the resurrection rested on the gospel he first presented to the Corinthians. The word gospel means "good news." This good news extends to every area of believers' lives and into eternity. Paul's reason for clarifying the gospel was to set the stage for showing that Christ's resurrection assures believers' eternal life with God.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul gives the content of the gospel. According to these verses, what is the gospel message? How crucial is the cross and the resurrection to the entire gospel story?

Why are both stated “in accordance with the Scriptures”? Why is this fact so important?

The essence of the gospel is that Jesus became a man, died for our sins, and was raised according to the promises of Scripture. Christ's death is part of the gospel because it is the good news that He took on our sins and our death on the cross. The resurrection is part of the gospel because it shows that Christ is God, meaning He can cover all our sins. The Scriptures pointed to Christ coming and dying a substitutionary death.

If Christ stayed in the tomb, would His death have covered everyone's sins? Why or why not?

How does Christ's resurrection show He is God?

If Jesus had stayed in the tomb, then He was just a man. Any man can die. In fact, all do. Only the God-Man, Jesus Christ, could have died the death that took on the sins of man and dealt with them eternally. The resurrection is the power of salvation. The cross is the place of salvation.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-8.

What is the purpose of an eyewitness testimony in a trial?

Consider the specific eyewitnesses Paul mentioned in verses 5-8. Why would these have been important reminders for the Corinthians? What does this list communicate to us as readers of Scripture today?

In verses 5-8, Paul mentioned several of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, which validated that He had risen from the dead and Scripture had been fulfilled. The Gospel of Luke records several of these appearances as well (see Luke 24). Nothing holds more weight in a trial than an eyewitness account of what happened. Similarly, the fact that so many people saw the risen Christ gives proof to the validity of the resurrection.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What difference does the resurrection of Christ make in your daily life?

How can you use the resurrection as a tool when you share your faith with others? How can it show others the plan of God?

How do you respond when someone challenges the reality of the resurrection? How do you proclaim Jesus' resurrection to others?

How can you be a part of God's plan and make it known to others? How should it affect the way that you plan?

PRAY

Close your time in prayer, praising God for who Christ is. Praise Christ for being God in the flesh who died and rose. Thank God for the resurrection, which is the power of salvation. Pray that your group would reflect on and think about who Jesus is and all that He has done for you.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8

15:1. Paul appealed once again to the Corinthians as brothers as he began to talk about the resurrection. By this affectionate term Paul affirmed the Corinthians in their basic commitments to Christ's resurrection, wanting to remind them of the elements of the gospel, not to challenge their acceptance of it.

The gospel, or good news, is the message of God's saving work in Christ. Up to this point, Paul had oriented the gospel message around Christ's death, but here he preached the gospel by emphasizing the resurrection. He also affirmed his belief that the Corinthian Christians had received this gospel message and had taken their stand on it. In Paul's day being a Christian was more than intellectual assent to a group of doctrines. The social price that followers of Christ paid forced them to take a stand in a hostile world.

15:2. Anticipating the importance of what he would say about the resurrection, Paul made it clear that anyone who did not hold to the gospel he had preached could not be saved. Only by this gospel could they be saved from God's judgment. Salvation comes through belief in the good news of Christ's death and resurrection.

Yet, Paul added an important qualification. They are saved, if they hold firmly to the word. As he indicated throughout this epistle, Paul believed that saving faith would set itself apart from insincerity through time. True believers persevere in their commitments to Christ. Paul did not mean that truly regenerate people could lose their salvation, nor that truly regenerate people were without sin and failure. He understood, as the entire Bible teaches, that saving faith proves itself over a lifetime.

Paul warned that if the Corinthians had once trusted the gospel of Christ but did not hold fast to that gospel, then they believed in vain. In other words, their temporary commitments to Christ would not benefit them as they had hoped. Anyone who turns away from belief in the resurrection of Christ puts himself in a precarious position. He or she stands in line for God's judgment, not for his eternal salvation.

15:3-4. Paul next explained why it was important for the Corinthians to believe his teaching about the resurrection. He justified his insistence that they hold fast to the gospel, insisting that the resurrection was central to the gospel message. Why was this so important? Why was the resurrection a necessary element of the gospel?

First, Paul received and passed on this gospel. In rabbinic Judaism this terminology described the transmission of authoritative religious teachings. Paul told the Corinthians to maintain the gospel as he had given it to them because it was a sacred tradition, not a human tradition.

Second, he delivered this gospel teaching as a matter of first importance. In other words, nothing was more central or more important in Paul's conception of gospel than these teachings.

Paul summed up his gospel as having two main concerns: the death and the resurrection of Christ. Both of these took place according to the Scriptures. Paul repeated this phrase to emphasize the importance of the scriptural witness and to demonstrate that the resurrection's importance paralleled the centrality of Christ's death.

He spoke first of Christ's death, declaring, Christ died for our sins. Christ's substitutionary death on behalf of believers brought salvation to those who would otherwise have been lost. When Paul said that Christ's death was according to the Scriptures, he probably had in mind Isaiah's prediction that the son of David would suffer on behalf of the people of God (see Isa. 53:1-12).

Second, Paul referred to the resurrection. Christ was buried, but he was raised on the third day. Paul never said that Christ raised Himself. Instead, the apostle taught that God the Father raised Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 1:4; Gal. 1:1). The resurrection was also according to the Scriptures. Paul probably had in mind Isaiah 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. Jesus defended the idea of resurrection in the Old Testament by asserting that God was the God of the living (see Matt. 22:31-32). By including both Christ's death and resurrection as essential elements of the gospel, Paul precluded those who denied the resurrection from claiming salvation in Christ.

15:5-8. Paul continued by adding a third element that expanded the second. Christ was not simply raised from the dead. He also appeared; people saw and heard Him. Paul did not repeat the refrain "according to the Scriptures" here because no particular prophecy focused on appearances of the resurrected Son of David. But Paul did note that several people saw the resurrected Christ. These included Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers most of whom were still living, James, all the apostles, and Paul himself. Although Paul's main idea was that all of these people bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, his list had at least three major concerns. Christ appeared to: (1) figures of central authority in the church (Peter, the Twelve, James, all the apostles); (2) large numbers of people (Twelve, five hundred, all the apostles); and (3) to Paul himself.

Paul declared that Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus last of all as to one abnormally born. The expression "last of all" probably indicates that Paul was the last person to see the resurrected Christ. Viewing the resurrected Savior was a requirement for apostleship (see Acts 1:21-22). Yet, Paul admitted that his own situation had been extraordinary because Christ came to him in a miraculous manner after the ascension.

Thus, Paul saw himself as having been abnormally born. This expression is difficult to translate because it occurs only here in the New Testament. In an effort to express his humility, Paul compared himself to an untimely born child, indicating some degree of inferiority to those who had lived with Jesus during His earthly ministry.