

Week 1: 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 – The Crux of the Gospel

Hook



Main Point: The Resurrection of Jesus is a verifiable fact and the foundation of the Gospel.

Easter is celebrated around the world, often accompanied by traditional family meals. While the main dish may stay the same, side dishes can vary by culture and custom. For example:

- **Italy:** Stuffed artichokes
- **Greece:** Lentil soup
- **New Zealand:** Hot cross buns
- **Spain:** Torrijas (similar to French toast)
- **Germany:** Fish cakes

Q: What are your favorite side dishes at Easter brunch, lunch or dinner?

Q: How often do you add a new side dish to your Easter meal?

Most families are willing to rotate side dishes from year to year, but replacing a main dish is much harder. The main courses define the meal.

In today's lesson, Paul reminds us that the Resurrection is not a side dish in the Christian faith. It is not a secondary or tertiary belief; it is primary. You cannot remove it from the menu. Christianity does not exist without the Resurrection.¹

Study introduction: We could take many angles to talk about the hope of the Gospel on Easter. For some of us, this may feel like an unusual one because it's not the story of Easter from the Gospels. Instead, it's Paul's answer to the theological questions the early Christians in Corinth were asking about the Resurrection of both Jesus and believers. The Resurrection changed everything. It is the foundation of the Gospel of

Jesus Christ. Without it, our faith means nothing, there is no point. The Corinthians were questioning the future Resurrection of Jesus' followers. Paul told them the Resurrection of Christians and the Resurrection of Christ went hand in hand; you cannot have one without the other. The whole point of Jesus becoming human, dying in our place, and rising again was so we could rise with Him. Otherwise, He could have just stayed in heaven. This is the hope of the Resurrection – not just that Jesus rose from the dead but that we will rise one day, too. And we can live a new life, a "Resurrection life," as a new creation in Him, even in the here and now. Our old selves have died with Christ, and we have been raised to a new life in Him.

Historical Context of Corinthians

Corinth was a narrow land bridge connecting Northern Greece (the mainland) and Southern Greece (the Peloponnesian peninsula). It had two major harbors, making it a commercial hub with both land and sea trade routes. Corinth was a cosmopolitan crossroads with a mix of diverse cultures. There was a large wealth gap between the rich elites and the day laborers and slaves, which explains issues in the Corinthian church such as their abuse of the Lord's Supper, lawsuits between believers, competition in social status, and factions.

Corinth was filled with temples to the Greek gods, especially Apollo (god of music, arts, and prophecy) and Aphrodite (goddess of love and beauty). This explains Paul's repeated concern about sexual ethics in 1 Corinthians. Because of the background of Aphrodite worship, the city had a legendary reputation for temple prostitution and a very sexually permissive culture outside the temple, with widespread prostitution, adultery and pederasty. They also held the Isthmian Games every two years, which explains Paul's use of athletic imagery in his letters to them. The city was known for indulgence with banquets, drinking parties, and boisterous entertainment, which may have impacted the way they misused the Lord's Supper.²

Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church between 53 and 55 AD, while he was in Ephesus. Paul had planted the church at Corinth with the help of Priscilla and Aquila and Silas and Timothy during his second missionary journey about five years earlier.³ He spent a year and a half there, teaching and building up the church. Later Apollos came to Corinth after he had been trained by Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (Acts 18:1–11). This is why Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul wrote this letter because he had received a report regarding:

- factions in the church based on which teacher they followed – Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ (1:10–13);

- grave sexual immorality that was even bad by pagan standards, and they were boasting about it (5:1); and
- deep social divisions and the rich's mistreating the poor during the Lord's Supper (11:18).

At the same time, a letter arrived from the Corinthians to Paul asking questions. This letter was his response to both their questions and the report he had heard.

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1 Corinthians 15:1–4 [Read]

Talking Point 1: The Resurrection is central to the Gospel, not a theological side issue.

Q: How did Paul summarize the Gospel the Corinthians had received?

Q: What does it tell us that this happened “in accordance with the Scriptures”?

When we study the Epistles, we need to remember that most of them are occasional documents – written by a particular person to particular people for a particular reason. While their content can be applied to any believer in any time and place, it started with a specific context in its original time and place. In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote a letter to his dear spiritual children, those he had personally led to the Lord and spent a year and a half pouring into, teaching, and discipling. He addressed some grave concerns he had been told about them – theological factions, sexual immorality, and division within the church based on socio-economic status, as well as answering some of their theological and moral questions.

Paul addressed one of the most essential questions of the Christian faith toward the end of the letter. Why was it the so important? Because this is a question that is central to the Gospel, not a side issue about which we can “agree to disagree.” In other letters, Paul explained that we can have different views or convictions about non-salvific issues like dietary laws, the holy days, drinking wine, and eating meat (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 10:23). But we cannot disagree about core Gospel issues; otherwise, we simply aren’t practicing the same faith (Galatians 1:6–7). Theologians describe this as “unity in the essentials, liberty in the non-essentials, and charity in all things.”⁴

In 1 Corinthians, Paul bookended the letter with two essential issues. He opened with the fact that it is only Christ whom we follow, not any of the apostles/teachers. He closed with the point we will be studying this Easter – that the Resurrection of Christ was a real, bodily Resurrection, and His followers will also be bodily resurrected one day in the age to come. Some of the Corinthians had been disputing the future Resurrection of believers (v. 12). Paul wrote to remind them that the Resurrection of Jesus was an established fact, testified to by many eyewitnesses, and is the very foundation of the Christian faith. He also said the Resurrection of Jesus is tied to the Resurrection of His

people; the two cannot be separated. Paul is addressing a teaching that denied the future resurrection altogether. To embrace that denial would be to reject a core element of the Gospel and step outside the faith once delivered.

First, Paul reminded them of the Gospel “I preached to you.” Paul was the one who originally shared the Gospel with them, originally taught them the core points of sound doctrine. They had received it; they stood in it; it was the foundation of their faith. This is the Gospel by which we are saved; anything contrary is a false Gospel, by which we cannot be saved. Verses 3b–4 are the basic points, which, because of the structure and context, we can tell was a confession memorized by early disciples. “What I received, I passed on to you” describes the method of what scholars call “traditioning,” how Jewish teachers passed on teachings to their students who would pass them on to others. They memorized these sayings and repeated them verbatim.⁵ The points are simple and form bookends with “according to the Scriptures,” which is emphasized to remind us that Christ is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Old Covenant:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Isaiah 53:4–12

He was buried.

He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Psalm 16:10; Hosea 6:2

Paul started with this foundation, reminding them that this is what they were taught, what they believed and stood on in faith. Now that he had established that they could all agree on that, he moved forward with the rest of his explanation of the meaning and hope of the Resurrection.

Q: Why is the Resurrection the crux of the Gospel? Why does the Gospel not make sense without the Resurrection?

Q: Why did Paul say we must “hold fast” to the Gospel? How have you seen people drift from Gospel-centered living? What “other Gospels” do people put their trust in?

Q: How does the promise of a future bodily resurrection change the way we view suffering, loss, or perseverance in this life?

1 Corinthians 15:5–8 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus’ Resurrection is true history witnessed by many eyewitnesses.

Q: How many people saw the risen Jesus? What does this tell us about the truth of the bodily Resurrection?

Paul focused on sharing the eyewitness testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus because in the legal system in the ancient world, eyewitness testimony was highly valued. Especially when there were many eyewitness testimonies that said the same thing, but not so similar that it seemed like collusion on a fabricated story.⁶ In the Gospel accounts, the risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18) and other women who followed Him, before revealing himself to His male disciples (Matthew 28:1–10). Paul started with Jesus' appearance to Peter.

The testimony of women was not considered admissible in court in their culture. This makes it much more likely that the Gospels accounts were true, not made up, because if the male disciples were making up the story, they wouldn't have made the first eyewitness to Jesus' Resurrection women. This makes the story more reliable, not less.

Yet Paul started with Peter and the 12. Those who are familiar with the Gospels would know that Thomas said he would not believe unless he actually touched the holes in Jesus' wrists and side. When Jesus appeared to him, Thomas responded with a bold declaration of faith. Not just "my Lord" but also "my God" (John 20:28). The risen Jesus had a real, physical, and glorified body, the same body that was crucified, now transformed and victorious over death, even as He remained recognizable to His disciples and bore the wounds of the cross. His new glorified body was also able to appear in a locked room (John 20:19) and disappear instantly (Luke 24:31).

~~Supernatural because He could appear and disappear, yet not fully glorified as it would be after His ascension. He still had the wounds, and He didn't shine as He did at the Transfiguration. When Jesus' return is described in Revelation, His eyes are like blazing fire, His hair is white as snow, His feet are like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His face is like the sun shining in all its brilliance (Revelation 1:12–16).~~

Paul emphasized that most of the 500 men who saw the resurrected Jesus were still alive, reminding the Corinthians that if they doubted him, they could ask them. Plenty of people could corroborate his story. Luke told us He appeared to them over a period of 40 days, teaching them about the kingdom. Forty is the number of days it rained in the flood, the number of days Moses spent on top of Mount Sinai meeting with God, and the number of days Elijah ran from Queen Jezebel until he encountered God.

Paul included himself last. Jesus appeared to him much, much later on the road to Damascus. After He had already ascended to the Father, after the Spirit had come, after His disciples had been spreading the Gospel. This alludes to the idea that Jesus can appear to anyone anytime. He was not limited to appearing to people only in the 40 days between the Resurrection and Pentecost. He could appear at any moment to anyone, even someone who seems like His greatest enemy. This is being reported right

now among Muslims across the Middle East. Many are sharing personal testimonies of Jesus' appearing to them in visions and dreams and coming to faith in Him through it.⁷

Q: Why do we trust the eyewitness testimonies of these people if this all happened 2,000 years ago? How can we trust they were telling the truth?

Q: How have you personally experienced Jesus?

Q: What difference does it make that the Resurrection is real, verifiable history?

1 Corinthians 15:9–11 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Paul's own experience shows the power of God's Resurrection transformation.

Q: Why was Paul unworthy to be called an apostle?

Q: How was Paul changed? What does this point to?

When Paul encountered Jesus, he did a complete 180. He went from being a persecutor of the Church, trying everything he could to stop the Gospel from spreading, to the chief evangelist to the Gentiles, spreading the Gospel all over the Roman Empire. His life was consumed by advancing the Gospel; it was his only concern (Acts 20:24). When he encountered Jesus, it was like his old life died and he was resurrected to a completely new life with a completely new identity, purpose and mission. Jesus was physically resurrected, but Paul was spiritually resurrected to a new life. One day, we will be physically resurrected to a new glorified body and new life in His kingdom. But even now, when we choose to follow Jesus, we are "buried" with Him and then resurrected to a new life in Christ (Romans 6:4). We are made a new creation that we may walk in newness of life (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, we put away our old self, our old way of life, and put on the new self and walk in His ways in a completely new and resurrected life (Ephesians 4:22–24).

This is what happened to Paul. The Gospel changed his entire life, everything about it. When we truly encounter Jesus as risen Lord, this is what happens to all of us. This is what repentance means – to turn back, to turn around and go in the opposite direction. Before Christ, we were walking in our own ways, doing our own thing, living the way we wanted, walking away from God. When we commit to Jesus, we turn around and go the opposite way – walking toward God, following Him. This is the Resurrection change the Gospel makes in our lives in the here and now, before we are physically resurrected in His eternal kingdom.

Paul wrote that he didn't consider himself worthy to be an apostle because of his past of persecuting the Church. But by the grace of God, he became a harder worker for the Gospel than any of them. Not because of his own strength or commitment or resolve, but because of the grace of God within him. Because of the Holy Spirit who transforms us, day by day, with ever increasing glory, into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Q: How does the idea of death and rebirth help us understand what it means to become a Christian? In what ways have you been transformed? How is the Spirit still transforming you?

Q: How has your mission and purpose in life changed? How is this reflected in the way you live your life?

Q: If all the Christians in the world really lived a transformed life focused on the mission of advancing the Gospel, how would the Church be different? How would we impact the world?

Q: Paul's life became centered on advancing the Gospel. What tends to compete for that place in our lives?

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Took

Main Point: The Resurrection of Jesus is a verifiable fact and the foundation of the Gospel.

World-renowned British preacher Charles Spurgeon, often called *the Prince of Preachers*, powerfully captured the importance of the Resurrection when he said:

“The Resurrection of our divine Lord from the dead is the cornerstone of Christian doctrine. Perhaps I might more accurately call it the keystone of the arch of Christianity, for if that fact could be disproved, the whole fabric of the Gospel would fall to the ground.”⁸

The doctrine of the Resurrection is not optional or secondary – it is essential to the Christian faith. This was precisely the issue the Corinthians needed to settle. In his letter, Paul answered questions that the Corinthians asked directly and even issues that they didn’t raise.

Faith grows best in the context of honest questions and trusted relationships. Is there someone in your life you feel comfortable asking theological questions? Would you say you have a firm grasp on what you believe – and why?

If not, we encourage you to speak with your LifeGroup teacher about connecting with a mentor through *Starting Point*, the personal discipleship curriculum at Prestonwood. It’s a powerful way to explore the foundations of your faith, strengthen your understanding of core doctrines, and walk alongside a mentor as you grow.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is the Resurrection so crucial to the Gospel? Why do we have to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus for it to make sense? Why do we have to believe in the Resurrection of His followers for it to make sense? What does this tell us about our future hope? What does it tell us about the way we can live in Christ in the here and now. Reflect on how you would explain the Resurrection to someone who doesn’t know Jesus and how you would describe how foundational it is to the Gospel.

PRAY a prayer of thanksgiving for the Resurrection of Jesus. Thank Him for becoming one of us and enduring the cross so He could rise again to new life and create a way for us to rise again, too. Praise Him for His goodness, love, grace and transforming power.

Thank the Holy Spirit for making you a new creation in Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to transform you more and more into the image of Christ as you walk in newness of life.

ACT: Testify. Share your own “eyewitness” testimony. Even though you haven’t physically seen Jesus’ resurrected body, share with someone this week your testimony of how you know Jesus is real, how you know He really rose from the dead, and how He has raised you to a new life in Him.

¹ <https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/g38868871/traditional-easter-foods-around-the-world/>

² Roy E. Ciampa, Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Volume 36, Issue 3

³ Paul repeatedly spoke as the founder of the Corinthian church – 1 Corinthians 3:6; 3:10; 4:15; 2 Corinthians 10:14.

⁴ This quote is often attributed to Augustine of Hippo, but its origins trace back to Rupertus Meldenius in the early 17th century – Mark Ross, “In Essentials Unity, in Non-Essentials Liberty, in All Things Charity” Ligonier - [In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity by Mark Ross](#)

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

⁶ Frank Turek and Norman L. Geisler, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

⁷ Billy Hallowell, “Iranian Muslims Find Jesus in Truly Miraculous Ways: ‘God is Using Dreams’” CBN News, Feb 29, 2024 - [Iranian Muslims Find Jesus in Truly Miraculous Ways: ‘God Is Using Dreams’ | CBN News](#)
Bible Blender, “A Christian movement is growing in several Islamic Middle Eastern countries, fueled by personal accounts of Jesus appearing to people in their dreams” August 4, 2025 - [A Christian movement is growing in several Islamic Middle Eastern countries, fueled by personal accounts of Jesus appearing to people in their dreams. - Bible Blender Bible Study](#)

Michael Foust, “200 Muslims in Gaza Reportedly Accept Christ after Seeing Him in Visions and Dreams” CrossWalk, Feb 21, 2024 - [200 Muslims in Gaza Reportedly Accept Christ after Seeing Him in 'Visions and Dreams' - Michael Foust | Crosswalk.com](#)

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle 26:193