

**God the Son: His Resurrection<sup>i</sup>**  
**1 Corinthians 15: [1-11] 12-28**  
**Week 7**

**Opening**

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

*God of ages, you have called us to this place at this time with these people to look more closely at ancient words of faith. As we encounter this creed, send your Holy Spirit to guide our discussions. Give us a humble eagerness and imaginative thoughtfulness that our eyes might be opened anew to the power of the faith we profess. We pray in the name of the One whose passion and resurrection we anticipate this Lenten season, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

It may be a good practice to recite the Creed together each week as we are taking a closer look at each line. This week, we'll discuss the line **"I believe... the third day he rose again from the dead"**

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*

**Check-in question**

1. How would you explain Easter to someone who asked you, "What's Easter all about anyway?"

## Jesus Christ's Resurrection

For the apostle Paul (the writer of this letter to the Corinthians), belief in the bodily resurrection is not optional.

It does not matter to him how scandalous it sounds. The scandal is part of the good news. Nonetheless, some of the Corinthians must have winced at the idea of a God who raised corpses. Why would God want these bodies? Why can we not just believe that God is powerful and follow Jesus's teaching to love one another? Do we really need to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? Do we really need to live in hope of Christ's return?

Paul does not budge. If there is no resurrection, there is no hope. If there is no resurrection, then everything we thought we knew about God is a lie. If there is no resurrection, then all we have is this life. And the so-called gospel is not really "good news" at all.

The text does not specify how Paul discovered that the Corinthians were doubting the resurrection, but the apostle does not sugar-coat his response. The word that Paul uses to describe what is being resurrected is *nekros*, a corpse. He does not say that the person's spirit is resurrected, or that the soul will go on and be with Jesus. He does not talk about loved ones looking down from heaven or floating around. The focus is on corpses.

The emphasis in this whole chapter of the letter is on a bodily resurrection. This is a God who cares about the physical stuff of the body. Though the text does not specify what the Corinthians' concerns are, their main objection to the resurrection appeared to center around the body since that is the focus of Paul's argument.

There are many reasons why a first century audience might not find belief in a bodily resurrection appealing. Even in Greek culture, that celebrated the body in its art, there were still strands of philosophical thought that vilified the body and cautioned against giving into its desires. The body, after all, was corrupt, physical matter. According to Plutarch, death was simply the release of the soul from the body. Marcus Aurelius taught that at death the body goes to the earth and the soul to the atmosphere.<sup>1</sup> The separation of the soul from the fleshly matter of the body was a widespread belief.

If the soul, which was considered pure and heavenly or celestial in substance, longed to escape the corrupt body, why would this God raise corpses? This must have seemed counterintuitive to Corinthians who had thought of themselves as educated, sophisticated, and wise. Why couldn't they place their hope in their souls going to be with the Lord?

Paul does not invent hope in the resurrection. Strands of Jewish thought hoped for resurrection. Paul was trained as a Pharisee and, according to the author of Acts, used the belief of resurrection to cause an uproar among the Jewish leaders who were considering his case (Acts 23:6-10). It was not hard to cause a disturbance over resurrection since the

Sadducees, who were present at his trial, did not believe in the resurrection. Yet, like the Pharisees, many Jews maintained hope in resurrection.

Paul's experience of seeing the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:8-11) changed his perspective on when and how God was renewing God's creation. Paul's hope for resurrection was no longer a distant future dream. God's life-giving power had invaded the cosmos and conquered death by resurrecting Jesus. With this act, God declared certain victory over death.

Paul does not care that the hope of a bodily resurrection might be repulsive. Christ's resurrection is non-negotiable. It has to be for the gospel to work. At the heart of this good news is the resurrection of Jesus. If God did not actually raise Jesus from the dead, then God is not stronger than death.

Death, for Paul, is not a neutral force. Death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). It is an anti-God power that must be destroyed if creation is to experience abundant life (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). This is a God of life.

Paul's gospel promises abundant life. How can there be a promise of abundant life if God is not stronger than Death? If God has not raised Jesus from the dead, then there is no hope that God will raise anyone else. Then, Paul's preaching is in vain; the Corinthians faith is in vain (15:14). And all who have hoped in Christ are to be pitied (15:19). "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (15:17).

For Paul, the great enemy, "Death," is the sidekick of sin. A little later in the chapter he writes that the sting of death is sin (1 Corinthians 15:56). Likewise, in Romans 6:23, Paul says that the wages of sin are death. According to Romans 5, sin has reigned from the time of Adam, and no one has been able to escape sin's power. All have been enslaved to the superpower of Sin, with a capital "S."<sup>2</sup>

For God to defeat Death is the signal that God has defeated the power of Sin. God's resurrection of Jesus is the surety, the first fruit, that God will defeat the powers of Death and Sin for *all* creation. It is the decisive act that has determined God's ultimate victory.

In an age where many churches are experiencing decline in attendance, some have intentionally decided to share only portions of the gospel that are "seeker-friendly." In other words, advice that sounds like wise council for living, like being kind to one another and living peaceably. While these are worthy goals, the gospel demands more. At the core of the gospel is a God who refuses to abandon creation to the corrupting powers of sin and death. This a God of *life*. And that is good news indeed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Carla. Working Preacher: Commentary of 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-1-corinthians-1512-20>

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-28 with a focus on verses 12-28

### Initial Reactions

2. What from these passages confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
3. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
4. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

### Going Deeper

5. Verses 12-19 make a bold statement about the implications if Jesus did not really rise from the dead. If he did not actually rise, what would change for the human race? For you personally?
6. What hope does the resurrection of Jesus offer to those who are afraid of death?
7. How does Jesus' resurrection connect with the rest of humanity (vv. 20-23)?
8. What do verses 24-28 promise about the final victory of God?

### So What Questions

9. What impact does the resurrection of Christ have on how you face life? Does it give you hope?
10. Read Colossians 3:1-4. How should the resurrection impact your thoughts?

### Heidelberg Catechism Question

Each week, a question from the Heidelberg Catechism will be included with this study guide. The hope is that COB folks would take time to reflect on this question during the week as it gives more framework for the Creed as we study together.

Question 45.

*How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?*

Answer:

*First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he obtained for us by his death. Second, by his power we too are already raised to a new life. Third, Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.*

### Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.

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<sup>i</sup> McGrath, Allister. *Life Guide Bible Studies: Apostles' Creed*. Intersity Press, 2016.