

1 Corinthians Session 11: Christ Has Been Raised (1 Cor 15:1-49)

(Scripture references based on NIV)

1. Key Learning Objectives

Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.

To understand that:

- If there was no Resurrection, then Christianity is meaningless.
- The Resurrection of Christ points to the future resurrection of the dead.
- We will be given wonderful new bodies during our resurrection.

2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question

These questions are meant to establish a baseline level of understanding or tease the themes of today's passage. You may pick one of the two. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.

- What do you think are the most important things we believe in Christianity?
- Are there parts of the Bible you find hard to believe?

3. Opening Prayer

Pray for the group as a whole or ask if any of your members feel led to pray.

Prayer pointers:

- *Wisdom in understanding the text and interpreting Paul's words.*
- *Fruitful and God-inspired discussions.*

4. Context

Possible beliefs held by the Corinthians (for leaders' reference)

- *"There is no such thing as resurrection!"*
 - *Some Corinthians were questioning both whether believers would one day be resurrected, and also whether Jesus Himself was resurrected.*
 - *Many were willing to accept that Jesus resurrected, but took it as a one-time event and did not believe they themselves would be resurrected.*

- *“Soul good, body bad.”*
 - *Influenced by the Greeks, the Corinthians were familiar with the concept of the soul, but had problems believing in the resurrection of the body.*
 - *Prevalent culture at the time taught that the soul is immortal, the body is weak and would soon decay.*
- *Regarding the “baptism on behalf of the dead” (v29)*
 - *Several interpretations exist. However, scholars say it is likely that Paul was referring to an actual practice by some of the Corinthians which involved literal baptism on behalf of the dead.*
 - *It is likely that this practice was not in accordance with Christian teachings as it is not otherwise mentioned in the Bible. Perhaps, it might have been not as harmful as Paul does not address it too extensively.*

The place of chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians

- After several chapters of instruction on specific topics, Paul now gets to one of the bedrock events of Christianity (the Resurrection) and the wider plan of God. The Corinthians have shown a misunderstanding of Christian teachings and Paul seeks to remind them of the fundamentals.

5. Scripture Reading

Have the youths go around and each read two verses at a time, taking turns till the whole passage is read. Give them some time to digest what they have just read afterwards.

6. Discussion Questions

- 1) Verse 11 tells us that the Corinthians believed in the gospel that Paul preached to them. Why do you think Paul thinks it necessary to describe what happened to Jesus with such great detail in v1-11?**

This question aims to get the youths to think from the point of view of the Corinthians and lay the groundwork for future questions. Get them to think about the passage in relation to what we know about the Corinthian church from the rest of 1 Corinthians as well.

Supporting question: What might v12 tell us about where the Corinthians are in their understanding of the fundamentals of the gospel message?

- Why Paul describes what happened to Jesus with such great detail
 - V12 suggests that the Corinthians do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, which is essential to the gospel message.
 - Paul reminds the Corinthians of the importance of Jesus’s Resurrection as it is the spiritual and historical bases of the gospel.

- Paul calls the Gospel something “of first importance” (v3) as taking it as fact is key to what he is going to say.
 - He reminds the Corinthians of precisely what happened at the Resurrection, and that it was witnessed by many people (v4-8).
 - As Paul says in v2 without the Resurrection our faith and Christianity as a whole is in vain. If the Resurrection did not happen then Jesus was not God, and what we believe would be false.
- With reference to the entire 1 Corinthians
 - The Corinthians had wandered astray from Christian teachings as shown throughout 1 Corinthians. They were prone to infighting, sexual immorality and lawsuits, demonstrating that they were struggling to live out their new faith despite claiming to be Christians.
 - Perhaps, it was necessary to point them back to the basics. The Corinthians were a new church who were heavily influenced by the non-christian culture surrounding them, and who soon began reverting to their old ways.
 - Paul reminds them of the Gospel to get them back on track, as they have forgotten what it was they “have taken your (their) stand” (v1) on.

2) Based on v14-19, what are the implications on Christianity if Jesus was not resurrected from the dead?

This question is to get the youths to consider the importance of Jesus’s Resurrection as it is an important part of Paul’s argument for the resurrection of the dead.

From the passage:

- If the Resurrection was false, the Christian faith would crumble (v14).
 - Not only would all preaching have no basis but the very Jesus who we have faith in would have betrayed that faith.
- The Resurrection has implications on the testimony of the church (v15).
 - The apostles and believers had been spreading Christianity on the basis of the Resurrection being true. If it did not occur, then they would have been spreading a falsehood.
- If the resurrection was false, there would be no forgiveness of sin (v17).
 - The Resurrection completes the promises associated with the death of Jesus, including the forgiveness of sins.
 - By Jesus’ death, the gap of sin between man and God was bridged (e.g. v3, Jn 1:29, Isa 53:5-6, Rom 4:25 and 5:10).
 - The Resurrection was proof that Jesus was truly God. Jesus’ promise of a covenant in blood for the forgiveness of our sins (Matt 26:28) only holds power because His coming back to life demonstrates that authority.

- The Resurrection gives hope for eternal life (v18-19).
 - If Jesus was not raised, then all those who had died with their hope in eternal life are, in reality, truly dead.
 - Christians are thus to be most pitied as they live and hope foolishly for something that will never come.

3) V20 tells us that Paul believes that Christ has, in fact, been resurrected from the dead. From v12-13 and v20-22, what connections does Paul make between the resurrection of the dead and the Resurrection of Christ? From v20-28, what does he say will happen during the resurrection of the dead?

Supporting questions: What does Jesus' resurrection mean for the resurrection of the dead? What can Man look forward to?

Implications of Jesus' resurrection for mankind:

- Disbelief in the resurrection of the dead is incompatible with belief in the resurrection of Christ (v12-13).
 - Paul says in v13, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised".
 - Simply put, why should we believe the power of God is capable of one thing but not the other?
- The resurrection of Christ is the promise for the resurrection of the dead (v20).
 - Paul uses the analogy of "firstfruits" to show that the Resurrection was simply a foretaste of the future resurrection of the dead, and is in fact a promise of the final victory of God.
- The resurrection of the dead mirrors the fall of Adam because of Jesus (v21-22).
 - Because of the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the dead is possible. Thus, just as the curse of death was inflicted on humanity through Adam, a man, so death will be removed through Jesus, also a man.

What will happen at the resurrection of the dead:

- The resurrection of the dead is the next step in God's salvation plan (v23-24).
 - Paul shows us the steps to God's planned victory, starting with the Resurrection, then the final coming of Christ and resurrection of the dead which signals His final victory.

- The coming resurrection of the dead will symbolise the final victory of God over death (v25-26).
 - Before Jesus can hand over the kingdom to His Father, all “dominion, authority and power” (v24) must be destroyed, and death is the final enemy to be conquered.
 - Once death is conquered completely, then the dead will be resurrected, and it will signify that Christ has defeated everything and God's victory is complete and He will reign over all things.
- When the dead are resurrected, God will reign over all (v27).
 - Paul makes it clear that God is not included in the things that Christ will conquer, as God is the one who gives Christ the power to conquer.

4) In v35-49, how did the Corinthians' doubts about the resurrected body affect their belief in the resurrection of the dead? What does Paul say this new body will be like?

This question aims to get the youths to analyse the passage and also encourage discussion of the resurrection of the dead.

- The Corinthians’ inability to understand that they will receive new bodies during the resurrection led them to not believe in the resurrection of the dead at all (v35-36).
 - Paul goes to great lengths to make it clear that the resurrected body will be different and far greater than our current ones (v38-45).
- Additional historical context:
 - Influenced by Greek ideas, the Corinthians saw the soul as being non-material and immortal, but the body as weak and prone to age and decay. It was thus easier for them to believe in the Resurrection of Christ as a one-off event, but that they themselves could be resurrected with their weak bodies seemed impossible.

What Paul says about the resurrected body:

What Paul says:	What we might understand about resurrected bodies::
v37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.	Just as how a planted seed has the ability to grow into something very different from what it was before, it will be likewise with new bodies during the resurrection of the dead.
v40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one	The new heavenly bodies will be splendid, but in a way that is different from how earthly bodies are.

kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another.	
v42 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 dishonour, 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.	The new bodies will be perfect, wonderful and glorious in many ways.
v49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.	The new bodies will still be made in the image of God.

(These are the interpretations by the writer. They are neither definitive nor exhaustive.)

7. Main Discipleship Takeaway

Ask the youths how they would summarise everything that has been discussed today with one sentence.

The Resurrection of Christ is the promise of God's victory.

8. Application / Reflection

Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions.

1. How does the prospect of the future resurrection and/or Christ's final victory change the way you live your life?
2. How would you explain Christ's Resurrection and its importance to someone who has never heard of Christianity before?
3. Why do you think people have such a hard time accepting the resurrection of Christ today?
4. What imperfections of your current body frustrated you, and which descriptions of the bodies of the resurrected excite you most?

9. Closing Prayer

Remain in your smaller groups and take turns to pray for each other. Where there is time, encourage members to share about specific areas for prayer in their lives.

- Ask for solidarity and certainty in our faith
- Ask for the assurance in our day to day lives that our belief is not in vain
- When praying for each other, pray for at least one request and one thanksgiving