

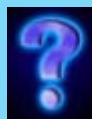


FIRST CORINTHIANS

STUDY GUIDE WORKBOOK

MOMENTUM MINISTRIES

Day 1 ~ 1 Cor. 1:1-9



Discover

1 Corinthians 1

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving

4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

1. Who does Paul list as the co-author of this letter?

2. What does Paul mean by saying that his testimony about Christ was being confirmed by the Corinthians?

3. Why does Paul believe that God has shown his faithfulness by calling them into fellowship with Jesus?



Display

In writing this letter, Paul realized that what he would be telling the Corinthians would become a part of the work that God was doing in sustaining them, bringing the work he had begun in them to completion. The letter itself was a part of the process. In reading this letter now, we must realize that this letter will become part of the process through which God shapes and molds us into his people of 'called out ones'. The key to allowing Scripture to have its full effect on us is to become what we read, not just to read it. We must let the words of God transform us as we meditate on it. Make a determination that you will read this letter with such a goal. Pray each day that God will use the words of this letter to transform you into the type of person and a part of the type of community that he desires.

A friend of mine recently became engaged. Everyone who knew him, knew that it was coming. Why? Because you couldn't have a conversation with him without hearing the name of his now-wife several times. She was at the center of his thoughts all of the time. This is the sort of thing going on with Paul here. In the first nine verses of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions Jesus Christ nine separate times. He is at the center of everything that Paul does. This is a good thing to keep in mind, because without that understanding, this letter can come across rather argumentative or bossy. The fact is, though, that Paul was motivated by Jesus Christ in every thought, word, and action, and he wants the Corinthians to be that way too.

Paul knows what it means to be in Christ and to be part of the resurrected life of Christ both in the present age and in the age to come. The church in Corinth was a young and immature group of Christians that no doubt passionately loved God but didn't yet know how to live the life of Christ that they had entered. Throughout this letter, Paul will patiently explain to them the meaning of their life in Christ and how the gospel of the resurrection directly affects that life. To fully understand Paul's arguments throughout this letter, we have to remember that Paul is so motivated by Jesus Christ because he knows that the resurrection of the Messiah is the very heart of his message. The declaration that the Son of God had defeated death and risen from the dead was Paul's gospel (Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-9; Col. 1:23; 2 Tim. 2:8). If they are to live the life of Christ to the full then they needed to understand the full meaning of the resurrection in the present and in the future. Only then could they embrace the life of Christ to which they were called.

Most of the Corinthians were not Jews, they were Gentiles. They did not understand what it meant to have God as the very center of every area of their lives. They were living a different story without the understanding that they were being swept up into the new narrative of what God was doing in the world through his new assembly of 'called out ones' (which is what is meant by *ekklesia* or the word 'church' in v. 2). He calls them the church of God rather than the church of Corinth, reminding them to whom the assembly belongs. Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that Jesus is shaping them into a new sort of community, a new sort of people, and in order to become that new type of people, they must learn to have Jesus at the very center of their life and thinking, the way Paul does. From the onset, then, Paul stresses two important things about being a Christian: it involves being set apart and it involves being a part of a group created by God that extends beyond their local congregation. It is worth noting that we must understand this as a letter from Paul to them, first and foremost. It is not a letter directly written to us. When we have that proper understanding, then we can begin to learn the timeless truths for ourselves that Paul was teaching the Corinthians.

Paul sets all this up in verse 1 by reminding the readers that he is an **apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God**. Apostle means 'one who is sent'. Everything that he wants for them is a result of his being sent directly by Jesus. This calling did not come from his own will or sense of vocation, but from the will of God. He has been sent to help them to learn how to put Jesus at the center of their lives. He tells them in verse 2 that they are called to be holy, literally 'set apart'. They have become part of God's new story. He also wants them to see that they are but one part of that grand story. They are being joined together with God's children everywhere to take part in this incredible new work of God, that of crafting a holy and sanctified people that will represent Him to the world. The only thing necessary for entry into this people is to call upon the name of the Lord, a typical early Christian phrase denoting God's grace given out at the time of their baptism, which for Paul, was the time when one entered into the life of Christ, an extremely important concept for Paul to which he will appeal time and again in calling on them to conform to the life that they had been given in Christ.

Paul begins his letter (most ancient letters began with a greeting and a thanksgiving) by thanking God for the work he has already done in them. He also reminds them that the grace they have experienced is only available as a result of Jesus Christ coming into the world. One cannot separate the grace of God, shown to man, from the work and person of Jesus Christ. The practical result of this grace was that they had become a community that was growing in their speech and their **knowledge**. They had become a community of learners and had been confirmed as such by the fact that they had been given every sort of spiritual gift. So much so, as we will see, that the possession of these gifts had come to cause a problem.

That discussion will come in due time. For now Paul reminds them that Jesus will keep them **strong to the end**. He had called them in the past, would sustain them in the present, and will complete his work in the future. The present sign of that future promise is the incredible fellowship that they now share with other believers in Jesus Christ. They had become, in many ways, more interested in their own lives and desires than in living the life of Christ rooted firmly in a proper understanding of the resurrection of Christ and those in him. Paul wants his beloved children in Christ to realize that they don't need to grasp after extra spiritual experiences, pleasures of the world, or anything else, because they have everything they will ever need in the life of Christ. In the present age, they have every spiritual blessing available to them in the life of Christ. They have the resurrected life of Christ, one that will anticipate and guarantee their place in the resurrection in Christ in the age to come. God has called them into this life, this **fellowship**, and so they can rest assured that God will do everything in His power to keep them faithful to that life. That doesn't mean that Paul believes that they cannot become faithless and leave that life, but rather that they can rest assured that God will provide them in Christ with all of the strength they need to remain faithful to the end.





Divisions in the Church

10I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

13Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. 16(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1. Why do you think that Paul is so concerned about the divisions that are developing in the Corinthian church?
2. Are there any divisions in your church? What do you think causes them? What role have you played in these divisions developing or continuing?
3. Why do you believe that Paul was careful not to mention Peter or Apollos when he asks if he was crucified for them or if they were baptized into his name?



Display

What is your attitude when it comes to the leaders of your church? Do you view them as fellow servants of King Jesus? Sometimes we have the tendency to base our experience in our Christian community heavily dependent on our positive or negative feelings about the leaders in our church. When we do this, we are guilty of the same thing that Paul is bringing up concerning the Corinthian church. It means that we have lost sight of the centrality of Jesus. In what ways do you tend to put too much praise or too much criticism on the shoulders of the leaders in your church? What do you need to do to put Jesus back at the center rather than men?

A few months ago, my wife, my oldest son, and myself were all traveling to South Africa. We got all settled on our plane that was traveling from London to Johannesburg. It was a fairly full flight but there were a few empty seats. We were seated in the middle column of seats on a plane that had three seats on each side and a middle aisle of four seats. My son was seated on the aisle seat to my left while my wife was sitting to my right, and then on her right, on the other aisle seat, was someone that we did not know. The flight attendant was, no doubt, confused by the fact that my son and wife are a different skin color than I am and made the assumption that we were not together. She came up to me and offered me a chance to move to another seat where I might be "more comfortable." I won't speculate as to her inner thoughts that day, but the mistake she made was in thinking that I could be separated from my family. I simply was not willing to do that just so I could be a little more comfortable. Of course some people might be willing to do that for a mere twelve hour flight, but the incident points to a deeper truth. You just don't split families up. Families, by definition, stay together. They are not something that should split up or be divided lightly. This is true of biological families as surely as it is true of church families.

Many churches have suffered through the sort of thing that Paul is dealing with here. Members of the church begin to split off into factions, following one man or another, or splitting over a belief of doing things a certain way. Issues like this usually don't arise over serious doctrinal issues, but rather over issues of faction and preference. Nearly all of these type of splits have one thing in common, they have lost sight of the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If not dealt with, these factions will get more pronounced and tear a church apart. This is the type of thing that Paul was facing here in Corinth. Paul had been the first one there in Corinth, telling them about Jesus Christ, and many were bent on following Paul and his brand of teaching. After being converted in Ephesus, Apollos had come to teach for a time in Corinth. Apollos was learned in the Scriptures, and was a powerful and effective teacher. Many people obviously preferred Apollos and the way that he taught, and began to identify themselves as Apollos' disciples. To add to that, many others began to identify themselves as followers of Cephas (Peter). It is not clear whether or not Peter ever actually went to Corinth, but many felt that they were his followers. Then there was the group that said they followed Jesus. Everyone else was with this leader or that leader, but *they* were just following Jesus. This is an-all-too-common power play in situations like this: "Thanks for your little opinions, now let me tell you what the Lord's opinion is, that's what I'm going to follow."

Many people think of the early church in overly romantic terms. They have a picture of a church that is a near-perfect community, happily carrying out Jesus' words to love one another. The reality is not that simple. Right from the start, it's clear that the churches had to struggle to become the type of people Jesus called them to be. In verse 10, however, Paul states his entire purpose for writing this letter, and lets us know what the primary problem had been: divisions were arising in the congregation over issues that Christians shouldn't be dividing over. Paul had, evidently heard oral reports which let him know that the situation was a bit more serious than the Corinthians may have let on in their letter to him. Paul is wise enough to know that these sorts of ideological divisions are serious and can lead to more serious and permanent physical divisions in the family of Christ.

In verse 13, Paul confronts them squarely with how silly it is, if their factional arguments were carried to the full extent of their logic. Can the Christ be split up into little pieces? His obvious point is that the Church is the Messiah, they are the body of Christ, and cannot be split into pieces anymore than the person of Christ could have been. Then he asks them if he was crucified for them. Again, the answer is obvious because the statement is absurd (Note that Paul wisely does not mention Peter or Apollos here, although he easily could have, so that it does not appear that he is attacking them in any way). Nor, he points out, were they baptized into the name of Paul. They have forgotten that the central, unifying theme of their community was Jesus Christ. They are the body of Christ not a bunch of little bodies following other teachers. The fact is that Christ did die for them and they were baptized into his life. That's exactly the problem. They were arguing over differing viewpoints and favored teachers but they were baptized into one body to become one entity. They all shared in the one life of Christ. It by nature is something that should not be divided.

Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. They were quite proud of being a very Roman city on Greek soil, and were equally proud of their reputation as a city with a lively and superior intellectual life. Particularly popular in Corinth were a group of traveling teachers called sophists. Sophists would come into a town and teach their philosophy, gathering disciples for themselves in each town. Once they left, the disciples of various sophists would argue with one another over whose teacher was the greatest.

The Corinthians had clearly allowed themselves to fall into this worldly way of thinking. They were not thinking as a new community of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were behaving like the culture around them. They had been caught up in their world of eloquent oratory and zealous followings of those great speakers. Paul will quickly address the value of this sort of wisdom. He is going to explain to them that they must choose between the wisdom of the world and the power of the Messiah.

Paul completes this passage by downplaying who baptized them. This is not, as some groups have argued, proof that baptism is unnecessary. Quite to the contrary. It was Paul who said that we are clothed with Christ at baptism (Gal. 3:27). Paul assumes that they have all been baptized and understand the significance of it (see 1 Cor. 1:13 and Acts 18:8). Paul actually shows in this passage that two things are necessary for a person to call himself a follower, in the Christian sense, of another person. First, Paul would have to die for that person; and second, they would have to be baptized into the name of Paul. This parallels quite perfectly with the Christian teaching that Christ died for us, and we clothe ourselves with him at baptism. Baptism is a vital part of the Christian gospel and community as the point where our faith and God's grace intersect, but Paul was called to preach. There is no special significance in who actually does the baptizing. Paul is not speaking about baptism here, but about their attitudes about who baptized them.

Finally, it is common in the NT language where "not" doesn't negate one of the two items but prioritizes them. For example, Paul tells Ananias in Acts 5:4 that he has not "lied to men, but to God. He had, of course, lied to men, but lying to God was the most important thing. Paul, then is arguing that preaching and baptism are both important, but that faith and repentance that accompanies preaching is a prerequisite for baptism.





Christ the Wisdom and Power of God

18For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;

the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

1. What does Paul mean when he says the Cross is foolish to the perishing, but the power of God for those who are being saved?
2. Why would Paul write such advanced and flowing rhetoric in a passage where he is denying that this sort of thing plays any part in the message of the Cross?
3. What does Paul mean by saying that the Jews look for miraculous signs and the Greeks look for wisdom, but he only preaches Christ crucified?



Display

Paul says that "to us who are being saved," the message of the cross is "the power of God." Have you truly unleashed the power of God in your life. Have you completely surrendered and turned over every aspect of your life to God, or have you tried to cling to the wisdom of the world? The problem is that when we try to hang on to worldly wisdom, it limits the ability to truly unleash the power of God in our lives. What piece of worldly 'wisdom' do you need to let go of in order to fully realize the power of the message of the cross in your life?

Many people look back now and realize that Abraham Lincoln was one of the great public speakers in American history. Yet, Lincoln himself often poked fun at his own speaking abilities. He made great hay with the technique of pointing out how learned and eloquent his debating or political opponent was, while he, as he often pointed out, was not nearly as eloquent. He spoke a simple message and did not try to sway anyone with flash and dash. The irony of all that, however, was that he could turn out a beautifully eloquent and timeless speech better than nearly anyone. Perhaps the big difference was that, although he was capable of doing that, this is not what he put his trust in. What was important to Lincoln was the truth and sincerity of his message.

This is precisely what Paul is doing here. Paul sets about to contrast the wisdom of the world, wisdom that was so admired in Corinth, with the wisdom of God. In doing so, he perhaps has a bit of fun. In denouncing worldly wisdom and fancy speaking techniques, Paul demonstrates that he is every bit as capable as any sophist of delivering a finely crafted phrase. Truly, Paul is capable of producing a wonderful work of flowing and balanced rhetoric, but that is not where he hangs his hat. For Paul, the message that Christ was crucified and defeated death through resurrection was his gospel. That was the power of his message and his ministry.



This passage may be flowing and beautiful, but his original message when he first came to the Corinthians was not. His message was the simple, unadulterated message of the gospel. The Corinthians would have quickly realized, though, that this wasn't a brilliant new philosophy. This was madness. He wasn't speaking about something that would stimulate the intellect, Paul was preaching about an executed criminal from a race that everyone despised. This is not a message that would appeal to the Gentiles, but it didn't do much for the Jews either. The word translated 'stumbling block' here, means something that would entrap them in sin, a scandal. Paul's point was that this was not a message that was going to impress anyone who was listening from a worldly point of view. It was **foolishness to Gentiles**, and scandalous blasphemy to the Jews. But the foolishness and scandalous message didn't stop at a crucified Messiah. It got even crazier from a worldly perspective. This crucified Messiah was resurrected by the power of God, making the power of his resurrected life and his path of suffering for the benefit others available to those who would die to themselves and enter into his life. This was sheer madness to both Jew and Gentile alike.

Notice that Paul says, in verse 18, those **who are being saved**. The New Testament picture of salvation is not a moment of new birth that happens in a once-for-all instance. It is a process that will continue through our lives and only end at the glorious resurrection of the saints. This is why Paul could say, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, that we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The Christian process of salvation is the gradual restoration and transformation of human beings into the image of God, a process that continues throughout our lives and will only be culminated in the resurrection of those who are in Christ. The hope of the resurrection is key for Paul as it distinguished the Christian faith from the pagan religions whose hope in their religion lied solely in this life in the form of health, wealth, prosperity, and rescue from peril and then culminated in release of their soul from the evil physical world. Resurrection put the things of this present age in proper perspective but also retained the reality that what we do in the present age matters because God will restore His creation one day (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rev. 21:1-5).

When Paul got up to speak the message of the Cross, he let it do its own work. He didn't try to trick or manipulate anyone into listening to his message by using fancy words or the latest speaking techniques. He spoke the simple story of Jesus and let the truth of it stand on its own. Sure, he can spin a few fancy sentences together like any of the great speakers, and he does so now to make a bit of a teasing point. He didn't do that when he first came to them, though. He spoke nothing but the raw message of **Christ crucified**. Preaching that message released a different kind of power than the one the world was familiar with. It was the power of God. It may have seemed like ridiculous scandal through the eyes of the world, but it was the very power of God to those that would hear with spiritual ears. This doesn't mean that Paul simply told the story of the crucifixion and nothing else. He is, in a shorthand sort of way, referring to the gospel message that Christ, the Davidic Messiah, was crucified, resurrected defeating death and making that resurrection available to all those who would lay down claims to their own lives and trust in his (cf. Rom. 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:1-10; Col. 1:23; 2 Tim. 2:8-11).

Paul could have made the point that God's wisdom and power would blow away that of the world, but he doesn't. He makes his point even stronger by saying that God's foolishness is wiser than any human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than any human power or strength. Paul wasn't speaking an appealing announcement of some mighty king that was establishing an impressive kingdom, although in a sense that is exactly what he was doing. He was speaking the absurd message of God dying at the hands of the Romans in a backwater, insignificant part of the world. This crucified criminal was supposedly beginning a kingdom that did not derive its power from anything that could be perceived in this world. It was a kingdom in which the weak and foolish were just as welcome, if not more so, than the wise, powerful, and impressive. The foolishness was, in the world's perspective, the life of Christ. It seemed an absurd concept to the world, and still does, but it is the only way to resurrection and to God (Jn. 11:25; 14:6).

As he said in Romans 1:16, this message of the resurrection of Christ and its availability to those who would enter into and trust in his life (cf. Rom. 1:3-6), was one of which Paul was not ashamed. He would preach this sort of foolishness because he knew that this kingdom had the power to change the world. When people listened to this message it changed things. It changed people, it changed their perceptions, it changed their priorities, it created new communities and a new reality.

**The Resurrection Body**

35But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40There 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. 41The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

42So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48As 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. 49And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

1. Why is Paul so adamant that the Corinthians have the proper understanding of the resurrection?
2. What is the primary difference between the natural body (*soma psychikon*) and the spirit body (*soma pneumatikon*)?
3. What is the point of Paul's contrast between the first Adam and the last Adam?



Display

The hope of the Christian in resurrection is that we will have our natures transformed so that we will be animated by the Spirit of the living God. We will no longer be subject to temptation and sin. We will have natures that are incapable of sinning. How much does this motivate you in the present age? Take some time to today to think about the resurrection and what it means for us. Praise God for His incredible plan for mankind.

There is a lot of attention these days on how many miles per gallons different cars get. When gas was under \$2 (US) per gallon people didn't seem to care all that much but when it goes over that price or even much higher, then suddenly people start getting concerned about it. People start to want smaller cars that get better miles to the gallon and many have turned to hybrid cars and even electric cars to achieve that. In every case, however, the discussion has to do with powers the cars and makes them go. No one imagines that the material that makes up the body of the car matters a whole lot. When people speak of changing cars to get something with better mileage, they are speaking of what powers the car not what materials make up the body. They want to make a change that will really matter and alter the actual performance of the car in a meaningful way.

If the central hope of the Christian faith is, as Paul has been pointing to, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the subsequent future resurrection of all of those in Christ, then the obvious questions of how this will all work, begin to arise. What will the body be like? How will it happen? These are the very sorts of questions that Paul will begin to address in this dense section. But like the cars, it is important to know that Paul is not really concerned with what the body is comprised of, with what material it will be made of (there was simply no discussion of that as it was assumed that bodies in the resurrection would be just as physical as bodies are in our present age) but what the body runs on. Paul is discussing the animating force that powers our being and will.

The tone that Paul uses in the original Greek language for the questions of verse 35 suggest a mocking or skeptical tone, indicating a lack of belief in the whole process of actual bodily resurrection. It seems that many in Corinth had maintained the same view of death that their Greek-thinking compatriots had. They most likely held to the view that the resurrection would entail a separation of the body and soul, with the soul living on for eternity once it has escaped the prison of the body. Paul's answer to them is that they are foolish for this skepticism. Resurrection is not some form of living on after death in spirit form, in a body that wouldn't be visible to the natural human being, it is an actual reversal of death. That is the key. Those who experience the resurrection will actually die, but in Christ, death will be defeated and reversed as the natural body is transformed into something quite like the natural body, but also quite different.

In verse 44, Paul labels two types of bodies. One is the pre-resurrection "natural body" and the other is the post-resurrection "spiritual" body. This translation is misleading in that it implies that the bodies are somehow of a completely different composition. The question that Paul is answering is not the composition of the body, but rather what animates the body. Is it the *soma psychikon*, the body animated by the normal breath of life (the soul if you will), or is it the *soma pneumatikon*, the body animated by the Spirit of the living God? Paul is speaking in equal opposites throughout this passage as he talks of bodies that are perishable versus imperishable, honor (or glorified) versus dishonor, weakness versus power which culminates in a body that is sown a natural body that runs on the normal human soul versus the supernatural (a better translation than spiritual) body that will run on God's own spirit.

This is the heart of the issue for Paul. In this age, our bodies are given life and characterized by the ordinary human spirit, but in the age to come, those who have experiences the resurrection will have bodies animated by the Spirit of God Himself. This is why he says that our current natural bodies are sown perishable, in dishonor, and in weakness. What Paul means is that the current use of bodies, is not the ultimate purpose for which they have been made. Since the fall of man we have been marred by the effects of sin, subject to death, and become the mere image bearers of sinful human fathers (Genesis 5:3). In Christ, though, we will be raised to bodies that fulfill their true purpose, being raised imperishable, in glory, and in power. Through the Spirit, we will have our natures transformed to natures like God so that sin and death will no longer have power over us, and although we will have free will (as God does), we will no longer be able to sin because it will go against our very natures, the animating force of the Spirit of God. They will be imperishable, glorified, and in power. This is what will power our bodies, which is far more important and profound than a simple discussion of what the body is made of, a discussion that can only come about if we accept the Greek philosophical point that the material realm is bad and must be escaped by the soul.

This is what Paul means with his explanation of verses 38-41. God has created all different kinds of bodies with different purposes and properties. Within the bodies of humans, we bear the seeds of the intended purpose and glory that man was to have. This is not to say that Adam had a resurrection body and lost it due to sin. The resurrection body is something new, something for which man was intended. Paul's metaphor of a seed does not mean to imply that once we die, the seed of our bodies will flower into something new. His point is that just as a seed has all of the characteristics and ability to be a flower inside of it, so our 'natural' bodies have all of the characteristics and ability to be the imperishable, incorruptible resurrection body. The contrast between our new bodies and our bodies in the present age is that when a body is animated by the Spirit it will not wear out, it will not die. There are all kinds of flesh, Paul says. Man has one kind of flesh. It is not that we are going to have a different kind of flesh in the age to come, it is what animates that flesh that is of true importance.

Paul begins in verse 45 to state explicitly what he has had in mind all along. He is describing a new creation, a re-writing of Genesis 1 and 2. There are two kinds of humanity, the body animated by the natural human spirit and the one animated by the Spirit of God. The resurrection body will be the realization of what we were made for in the first place. The prototype of this resurrection body has already been rolled out through the last Adam, Jesus Christ. He is the one worthy of entering into the age to come. He lived without sin and thus had the right to become the truly human being. Those in Christ will experience all of this when He returns. Paul uses the word 'heaven' as the place of God's presences where he keeps things safe before their great unveiling (Col. 1:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Acts 3:19-21). This does not, in Paul's mind, mean that we will die and go to heaven, and become the new type of resurrected human there. No, God will somehow bring the resurrection, the renewal of humanity and all things from heaven to earth. At the time of the coming of Christ, He will transform the bodies of Christians who are still alive, and raising the dead to the same renewed deathless, glorified, body. Up to this point, we all have one thing in common, the fact that we share in the earthly likeness of our common ancestor, Adam. The glorious hope for the Christian, however, is that we will one day be transformed and our bodies will be redeemed (Rom. 8:20). We will become in fact what we are in position now as Christians. While we are in Christ positionally at the present time, we will, on that day of resurrection, actually bear His likeness for eternity.





50I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52in 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. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54When 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?" 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58Therefore, 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.

1. What does Paul mean that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God?
2. Why must those still alive when Christ returns be transformed?
3. Why does the resurrection motivate us to the Christian life in the present age?



Display

Do you live as though you are motivated by the hope of resurrection? Do you truly live and work as though what you do in this age will be woven into the tapestry of God's future age? For Paul, it was the present and future hope of the resurrection that motivated him not to sit back and relax, knowing that he would be okay after death. Rather it motivated him to work all the harder for the Kingdom of God. Get resolved to have the same kind of motivation and effort that Paul had.



As the battle raged on, suddenly Obi Wan Kenobi did something very strange in *Star Wars: A New Hope*; he raised his arms allowing Darth Vader to kill him. Why would he do that? Because in the world of *Star Wars*, once someone passes into the afterlife, they become even more powerful. Yet, the *Star Wars* conception of death is a sort of shadowy bodiless, ghost-like existence. It's not quite death but it's not quite life either. This is the sort of picture of life after death that was put forth by Plato and has been accepted by increasingly large portions of the Christian world since the 4th or 5th centuries. Yet this is not at all the sort of thing that Paul is teaching about in his longest passage on the resurrection. Paul believed in and taught bodily resurrection in a physical sense. He believed that in Jesus' resurrection body, the world was given a glimpse into what resurrection looked like. Jesus was, after all, quite adamant that He was not a ghost; He had a physical body with flesh and bone (Luke 24:39).

Why then, does Paul say that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God**? Does Paul not know what he is talking about here? Is he contradicting what he has said before or what Jesus said? Does he suddenly no longer believe in the bodily resurrection of the saints? Of course the answer to all of these questions is 'no'. When Paul uses the term 'flesh and blood', he isn't speaking technically. He is using a common figure of speech for regular sinful humanity. Jesus made it clear that the resurrection body was a physical, material body. Paul's point then, is that human beings must be transformed before they can inherit the Kingdom of God.

This is what he says in verses 51-52. Not everyone, he says, will have to die in order to undergo this transformation (a point of confusion for some because of all of the talk of transformation and which led, in part, to Paul's discussion of this very topic in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), but everyone will be transformed. It will happen in a **flash**, suddenly those dead in Christ will be raised to life in the age to come, while those still alive in Christ will be immediately transformed. In these two verses, Paul uses language similar to two other passages where he describes the moment of Christ's return, Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul says that the coming of Christ will be like a great trumpet call, signaling what was happening. There he uses a picture of Roman citizens running outside the city gates to meet the Emperor and then accompanying him back triumphantly into the city (meeting in the clouds is the language of God's presence, not bodiless spirits floating off into the clouds where heaven is; it is the time when the King will return to reign over His restored creation). In Philippians 3:21, Paul says that when we are transformed, we will be transformed so that our lowly bodies will be like Jesus' glorious resurrection body. It is at that moment when the perishable will transform into the imperishable. The mortal will be clothed with the immortal, but nowhere in site is the idea that we will have anything less than material, physical bodies.

It becomes clear that in Paul's new creation theology, all those in Christ will be transformed to enjoy glorious, incorruptible, immortal, imperishable bodies just like Jesus had after His resurrection. There is no shadowy ghost-like, spirit existence that would make Plato proud to hear of. That would be a compromise with death. If the soul somehow continued on without a body, then death would still rule victorious over the body, with Christ merely redeeming part of the human being. No, says Paul, death has been completely **swallowed up in victory**. The pagan world looked at death and realized that it could do nothing about it, so they simply accepted it and try to make it palatable. Even in the Jewish worldview, the best that could be done was to believe that God would do something about it in the future. Paul's message is quite radical from either of those options. He is saying that God has already done something about death. He has completely defeated death through the Messiah, and those who are in the Messiah are guaranteed to share in that victory when they too, one day, will be resurrected.

Paul now takes the tone of one who is taunting and mocking an opponent that has been rendered powerless. He teases death itself by quoting from Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13, passages which point to the victory of God over death. God has removed the sting of death, it's power has been swallowed up. Paul isn't merely proof-texting a couple of passages to make his point, he is emphasizing that, once again, this is what all of the Old Testament Scriptures pointed towards. God has gained the victory over sin and death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul, though, after taunting death a bit, doesn't stress that this is the glorious hope to which we should all cling, although he certainly feels that way. He says that knowledge of this should strengthen our resolve to labor in the Lord. The work that Christians do and the suffering that Christians endure is not in vain. There is a correspondence between what we do in this present age and what happens in the age to come. If God is going to resurrect us in the future age, then what we do now with our time and bodies matters. The resurrection is our future hope, but it is not just a future hope. We have access to the life of the age to come and should begin living it. Paul does not explain exactly how what we do in this age will be carried on into the age to come but we know that it will happen. This is why we do what we do now, in this age. The transformation of the mortal into the immortal, the perishable into the imperishable, and the corruptible into the incorruptible is our present and our future hope for those in Christ. Our job now is to begin to anticipate, as a community of believers, that life now in the present age. We are to show the rest of the world what it looks like to live by the values of God's age to come. Some will embrace it, others will reject those values, but living by them now will not be in vain. It matters now and will matter even more in the resurrection.

**The Collection for God's People**

1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

Personal Requests

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

1. Why was Paul so adamant about wanting to take up this collection?
2. What do the troubles between Jewish and Gentile Christians teach us about a developing life in Christ in the body of Christ?
3. Why was Paul so insistent on going to churches in person at the risk of life and limb rather than just writing them often?



Display

One thing that is implied in all of this talk of collections is the fact that Paul believed that giving to other Christians in need is the same as giving to the Lord Himself. Do you have that same attitude when it comes to giving? What about Paul's desire for Christians from other parts of the world to develop relationships? Do you use your resources and time to take self-fulfilling vacations or do you use them to build relationships with Christians in other parts of the world?



While I was teaching high school we had an annual event called the *Coin Clash*. This was a school-wide fund raiser based on collecting coins from the students. The money was collected by homerooms and it became a large competition between each homeroom. The money, once gathered, would then be donated to a worthy cause that had been chosen for that year. This was important, but the competition also served another important purpose. It was held early in the school year when classes could still be difficult because there was so much diversity whether it was due to race, gang affiliations, or something else. The competition served as a powerful tool to bring the students in each class together. They ceased to be a class of individuals and became a team, and often, great friendships were built during the week.

What Paul is doing with this collection is not quite like those collections, but there was a similar concept involved. Rather than getting all of the Christians to raise money and compete together to create unity, he is asking that all of the Gentile Christians take up a collection for the Church in Jerusalem. No doubt, one of Paul's motivations in doing this was to help out the Jerusalem Christians who had undergone incredible persecution and were now beginning to feel the effects of it. He has another purpose, though. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding and mistrust between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. It took a long time for the Jewish Christians to accept that the Gentiles could truly be viewed as equals within Christianity without also living by the visible markers of being a Jew. This collection would serve as a powerful sign and indicator that the Gentiles are part of the same universal church body that the Jewish Christians are. It would, at least in Paul's mind, build a great deal of unity between the two groups.

Paul doesn't give us a great deal of detail in this passage concerning this collection, but when we piece together the various other passages that deal with this great project, the details begin to fill in (see 2 Cor. 8-9; Galatians 2:1-10; Romans 15:24-33). The collection was charity for a hurting church, but it was also an opportunity to break down the walls of hostility and mistrust that had been built between the Gentile and Jewish Christians. Generosity and love would span a bridge over the chasm of suspicion that had been created between these two factions of the Church. This plan will encounter great difficulties (2 Cor. 8-9; Acts 21), but none of that is in sight yet.

One thing that we can learn from this passage is that Christian giving had not become entirely systematized yet, although it is clear that there was a central location available to collect and store money as a Church. There are many principles laid down for giving here, though, that will be a part of any church that approaches giving in a healthy way. Giving should be done regularly (**first day of every week**); universally (**each one of you**); systematically (**set aside a sum of money. . . saving it**); proportionately (**in keeping with his income**); and freely (**no collections will have to be made**). Regular giving of any type is vital for a Christian community because it is both a regular exercise in self-sacrifice as well as a powerful reminder that all that we have comes from God and by giving we return just a small portion of that to him.

Another part of Paul's plan is that he will not just send money to Jerusalem but he will send several men from Corinth, chosen by them, to go as well. This will serve the dual purpose of removing Paul from any suspicion of taking the money himself as well as generating a meeting, of sorts, between the Jewish Christians and several Gentile Christians. It is much easier to judge and develop prejudices against people that you don't know; this will help greatly in breaking down those walls. In addition, it is much easier for churches to continue giving sacrificially when faces can be attached to the giving. Once the Corinthian brothers have gone to Jerusalem it will be much easier to continue to give in the future to people that they know and love.

Beyond that, though. It is vitally important to develop deep and lasting Christian relationships beyond the confines of our own church and, in our times, even beyond the confines of our own countries. It is far more than just a matter of boosting financial support from wealthier churches to less fortunate churches. Building personal relationships like this between churches does a world of good for both the recipient churches as well as the providing church. They both benefit from the building of relationships, the growing horizons of friendships, and the expanding of their vision of the universal scope of the body of Christ. Personal relationships like this can be more costly than just sending money, but their true value is priceless.

Paul then informs the Corinthians of his travel plans for the immediate future. He intended to spend the winter in Corinth (winter travel was difficult to the point of being nearly impossible and was dangerous) and then head out once again in the spring. When Paul came, he didn't just want to spend a short time there and move on, he wanted to be able to really stay and enjoy some real time together. Yet, Paul always realized that plans might change. It is all dependent on the Lord's will not his.

Paul, for the immediate future, however, will stay in Ephesus. He mentions that there are both encouraging and discouraging things happening at Ephesus. Paul understands, though, that it is the Holy Spirit who has opened a door of opportunity. Paul has clearly learned an important concept. Wherever the Spirit truly opens a door for the gospel to be spread, opposition is never very far behind. There will rarely, if ever, be a time when the gospel can be preached without also facing great opposition. This should both encourage and steel us. Doors will open, but opposition will come as well.



10If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

12Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

13Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 14Do everything in love.

15You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, 16to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. 17I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

Final Greetings

19The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 20All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

21, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

22If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!

23The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

24My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1. Why would sending Timothy be such a strategic move?

2. Why is it so important that Paul demonstrate that there is no rivalry between Apollos and himself?

3. In what areas of your life do you need to be on guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, and strong?



Display

The final ties that Paul creates between himself and the Corinthians are his salutation of grace and love. Are these two things that characterize your life? Are you known for your grace and love? In what ways can you improve the manifestation of the grace and love of Christ in your life?



It is normal, even in our time, when writing a letter, to end it with some final words of encouragement, some exhortations, and final greetings. If there is a bit of a strain in the relationship between you and the one to whom you are writing you would probably stress a few items that you and the receiver have in common, things which would bind you together. In a few short verses, at the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul manages to do all of that. He encourages, exhorts, informs, teaches, and ties them together with him in their common relationship in Christ.

Paul plans to send Timothy to Corinth, but he seems to be a bit worried about the reception he will receive. It appears, from reading this and other of Paul's letters that Timothy, although strong and courageous, did not seem to have an extremely forceful personality. He was probably not the flashy impressive type of teacher; he was exactly the sort of guy that the Corinthians might look down upon. Yet, he is exactly who Paul wants to send. Why? This is another brilliant move by Paul, affording them the opportunity to apply in a real-life situation, the things he's been teaching them. If they accept a simple man like Timothy with open arms and accept his leadership, then they will have demonstrated the true sort of love and rejection of puffed-up ways that are talked about in this letter. In addition to that, having Timothy there with them, teaching them for a time, will create a strong tie between Paul and the Church in Corinth.

Paul then addresses the situation of sending Apollos. The phrase, **now about our brother Apollos**, seems to indicate that Paul is responding to something they inquired about. This makes it likely that the Corinthians had requested that Apollos come to them, as it is clear from earlier in the letter, that many in Corinth greatly enjoyed his style of teaching. Paul says he urged him to come (the word Paul uses can either be translated as "strongly" or "often"), but it will not work out right now. It is difficult to translate Paul's next thought concerning Apollos. It could be that Apollos was unwilling to come at that time, as the NIV translates it. This could also be understood as saying that it was God's will for him not to come. In either case, the important thing that Paul is stressing is that he desired for Apollos to come as soon as possible. This is another way of Paul tying the Church and himself together, while avoiding any hard feelings. Paul is demonstrating that there is no rivalry or division between he and Apollos, and that he is not in any way trying to keep Apollos from coming. The problem was not with Apollos or his ability to teach, the problem was with the value that the Corinthians were putting on that ability.

Paul then turns to military language to exhort and encourage the Church. Each exhortation builds on and comes out of necessity by executing the previous command. Paul says that he wants them to be on guard, always alert and ready for the attacks that will come on them as followers of Christ. When one stands guard, they will see the coming attacks and they must **be firm in the faith**. Doing that will require and necessitate them being men of courage, which is a necessary trait when the actual attacks come. Finally, in showing that courage they must **be strong**. Yet, this must all be tempered with love.

Paul creates another tie between himself and the Corinthians by praising the three men who have come to him from Corinth to bring their letter to him and carry his letter back to them. Paul supports these men not because they are supporters of him (as in those who follow Paul from chapter 1 because then he could just be accused of backing his own people, so to speak), but because of their strong example as men of faith. They have encouraged Paul and reinvigorated his spirit just as they had done for the Church in Corinth.

Even the greeting sent from Aquila and Priscilla was a brilliant act of relational discernment by Paul, one that created another tie between he and Corinth. They were Jewish Christians expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2), who had then gone to Corinth for some time. They were, no doubt, highly loved and respected, so Paul sends greetings from them. This not only reminds them of their affection for this couple but lets the Corinthians know that Aquila and Priscilla are firmly in the corner of Paul. Paul is not pulling out a bunch of political moves to manipulate them, he is trying, very strategically, to demonstrate his genuine love for them. This is demonstrated not only by what he says but even in the fact that he wishes to take the pen from his transcriber (perhaps Sosthenes, 1:1), and writes the final few lines in his **own hand**.

Paul ends by placing a curse on those who **do not love the Lord**. (It is possible that he is referring to those who had strongly opposed the spread of the gospel. These were primarily Jews, and thus, the curse mentioned would be specifically the curse of the Covenant from Deut. 28.) The final line is noteworthy in that Paul sends his love, but only to those in Christ, an idea that he has stressed throughout the letter. For Paul, this location and identification are the most important aspect of the Christian life. One to which we must all strive to conform.