



Community Group Discussion Guide

May 12, 2024

1 Corinthians 15:1-11; 50-58 | The Cause of Faithfulness

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

⇒ *How would you describe the way our culture thinks about and deals with death?*

DISCUSS

Ancient Corinth was a large and important city in ancient Greece. It was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, but was rebuilt in 44 BC, after which it became the Roman provincial capital of Greece. By Paul's time, Corinth was a bustling port city with two large harbors, an amphitheater, and numerous pagan temples. It was a center of trade, power, and politics, and an important location for the imperial cult — the political-religious worship of the Roman Emperor.

"The Corinthian church was being more influenced by their cultural surroundings than the truth of the Gospel. Division, worldly living, self-centeredness, and vain attitudes had driven a wedge between believers in the church and also between Paul and the church." -- Rose Guide to the Epistles, page 35

⇒ *Is the church today influenced by the surrounding culture? Can you give a specific example?*

⇒ *How does our culture influence our view of Jesus' Resurrection?*

"First Corinthians 15 is one of the most robust statements about the resurrection in the entire Bible. Paul ends his letter to the Corinthians with the reality of the resurrection because it is by the resurrection that the church can be unified, realizing that their lives then would have future spiritual implications." -- Rose Guide to the Epistles, page 35

⇒ *When did the reality of the Resurrection of Christ first impact you?*

⇒ *Why is His Resurrection an essential component of our faith?*

The gospel was the center of Paul's preaching and teaching. The good news of Jesus is intrinsically tied to His Resurrection from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; 50-58, Paul addressed the confusion among the Corinthians about the Resurrection.

There was a rumor spreading in the church that Christ had not been physically raised from the dead. Paul wanted the church to understand the necessity of the physical resurrection of Jesus to the Christian's faith. Removing the reality of the Resurrection is like trying to remove all the bottom blocks of the "Jenga" tower--the whole thing crumbles. The truth of the Resurrection changes everything.

⇒ *Do you believe Jesus physically rose from the dead at a particular moment in history? Why or why not?*

⇒ *What is the result of putting our hope in this life only?*

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, **2** and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. **3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians of the gospel which he had preached and they had received and believed.

- ⇒ ***What is significant about Paul's repeated use of the phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures?"***
- ⇒ ***What can we learn from Paul's simple presentation of the gospel?***

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **7** Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Paul cited two kinds of witness to the historic events of Christ's death and Resurrection: the Old Testament Scriptures and the testimony of eyewitnesses. In this passage, Paul felt no reason to mention any eyewitnesses of Christ's death and crucifixion, because its factuality was commonly accepted. The Resurrection was a different matter. If Christianity was to be believed, valid eyewitnesses must be cited to attest to this historical event and set to rest doubt about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul presented a list of Christ's Resurrection appearances beyond those that occurred on Sunday.

- Cephas: This is Peter's name in Aramaic. Undoubtedly, this one-on-one appearance went a long way in restoring Peter and in giving him the courage and boldness he displayed at Pentecost in Acts 2.
- The twelve: A common reference to Jesus' handpicked original disciples. With the absence of Judas, Acts 1 details the selection of Matthias as his replacement.
- More than 500 at one time: Paul doubtless included the sheer number of eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ to impress doubting believers.
- James: Jesus' half-brother. This appearance finally convinced James and he became a leader in the early church.
- All the apostles—including Paul: The apostles' witness was of vital importance for the Corinthians and some of these individuals may have been known to them. Paul included himself as the last witness. Paul's apostleship was based on his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 and his subsequent commission to gospel ministry.

- ⇒ ***Why was it strategic for Paul to include a record of numerous eyewitnesses to Jesus' Resurrection? Which appearance is particularly meaningful to you?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways have you become an "eyewitness" for Jesus?***

1 Corinthians 15:9-11 *For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

Paul reflected on his own unworthiness in comparison to God's matchless, redeeming grace. With true humility, Paul attributed all his faithful hard work for the cause of Christ solely to God's grace—grace that had saved him and enabled him to serve. It was grace alone that transformed him from a persecutor into a zealous preacher.

- ⇒ ***Why does it seem appropriate that Paul is often called "apostle of grace?"***
- ⇒ ***How has your life been changed by God's grace?***
- ⇒ ***How is His grace toward you not in vain?***

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*

- ⇒ ***Paul writes that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." What does he mean by this and what makes it impossible?***

Paul made it clear that those who rise will not be creatures of flesh and blood. He was referring to the mortal body—our present humanity, which Christ fully shared through His incarnation. The risen will no longer have bodies liable to death and decay. This mortal body is perishable and cannot inherit that which is imperishable. The unsaved cannot be in heaven at all, and the saved must have their bodies changed to be imperishable and immortal.

- ⇒ ***What excites you as imagine what your changed, resurrected body will be like?***

Paul did not know when these events would take place, and nowhere does he claim to know. The twinkling of an eye is the time it takes to cast a glance, or perhaps to flutter an eyelid. The resurrection of the dead might be likened to the slow growth of a seed, but the change in the living will take place with startling suddenness. It signifies the shortest possible time.

- ⇒ ***How does Paul's reminder of Christ's sudden return challenge you to live in a state of faithful readiness?***

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? 55 O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In verses 54-55, Paul utilized musical language to describe the total defeat of death. The Greek word *kentron*, meaning sting, may be used of the sting of bees or scorpions. Death is a malicious adversary, torturing people, but Christ has drawn its sting, and it is harmless to those who are in Him.

If it were not for sin, death would have no sting. It is the law of God with its stringent moral demands that strengthens the power of sin by showing us how sinful we are, and thus condemns us. It is not death in itself that is harmful; it is that death is "the wages of sin." (Romans 6:23). Death, considered simply as the passing from this life into the immediate presence of the Lord, is a gain, not a loss (Philippians 1:21, 23). Where sin is pardoned, death has no sting. It is quite another matter where sin has not been dealt with.

But death does not have the final victory! Christ is victorious over death. He has satisfied the law's claims. He has replaced the reign of sin with that of grace.

⇒ ***Verses 56-57 capture the heart of the gospel. How would you explain these verses to someone who is struggling to understand Christianity?***

1 Corinthians 15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain*

The Corinthians were prone to fickleness, shifting without reason from one position to another. Paul wanted them to get a firm grip on the truth of the resurrection and on God's final plan for all people and all things. Paul was confident that with this knowledge they would not be so readily shaken in their foundation. Instead, these truths would keep them faithfully working to expand God's kingdom and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- ⇒ ***Would you describe yourself as someone who is "steadfast and immovable" when it comes to the truths declared in 1 Corinthians 15?***
- ⇒ ***Do you believe that "in the Lord your labor is not in vain?" What difference does that belief make to your life?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: The message Paul wrote to the Corinthians is just as applicable to us today. Jesus' Resurrection is the foundation on which our faith is built. If the resurrection means God is doing what He said He would do and will do, it should change our lives not just today but for eternity.

- ⇒ ***How does this passage give you hope when you consider your own death?***
- ⇒ ***What kind of life should we live if death is not the end?***
- ⇒ ***In what specific ways is God calling you to be faithfully devoted His work? How can others help you in your endeavors?***
- ⇒ ***How would you help a brother or sister in the church who was doubting some essential element of the gospel? Is there anything you can take from this passage to help you in your response to that person?***

2. Pray: Praise Jesus for His life, death, burial, and Resurrection. Pray for endurance, stability, and assurance to understand this life is not all there is nor is this world our eternal home. Pray for those around the world who are faced daily with taking a stand for Christ. Ask God to help you fully understand that your work for Him is not in vain.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Mare, W. H. (1976). 1 Corinthians. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians (Vol. 10, pp. 289–291). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.*
- *Mare, W. H. (1976), 1 Corinthians. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians (Vol. 10, pp. 281–283). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.*
- *Morris, L. (1985). 1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 7, pp. 196–202). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.*
- *Rose Guide to the Epistles (2022), Tyndale House Ministries.*
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary.*