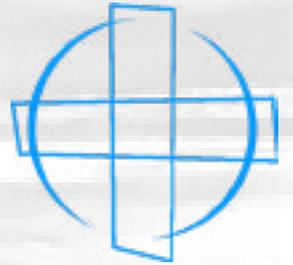


APRIL
2025

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

UNITED



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Letter Coming Soon!



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned into your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30 am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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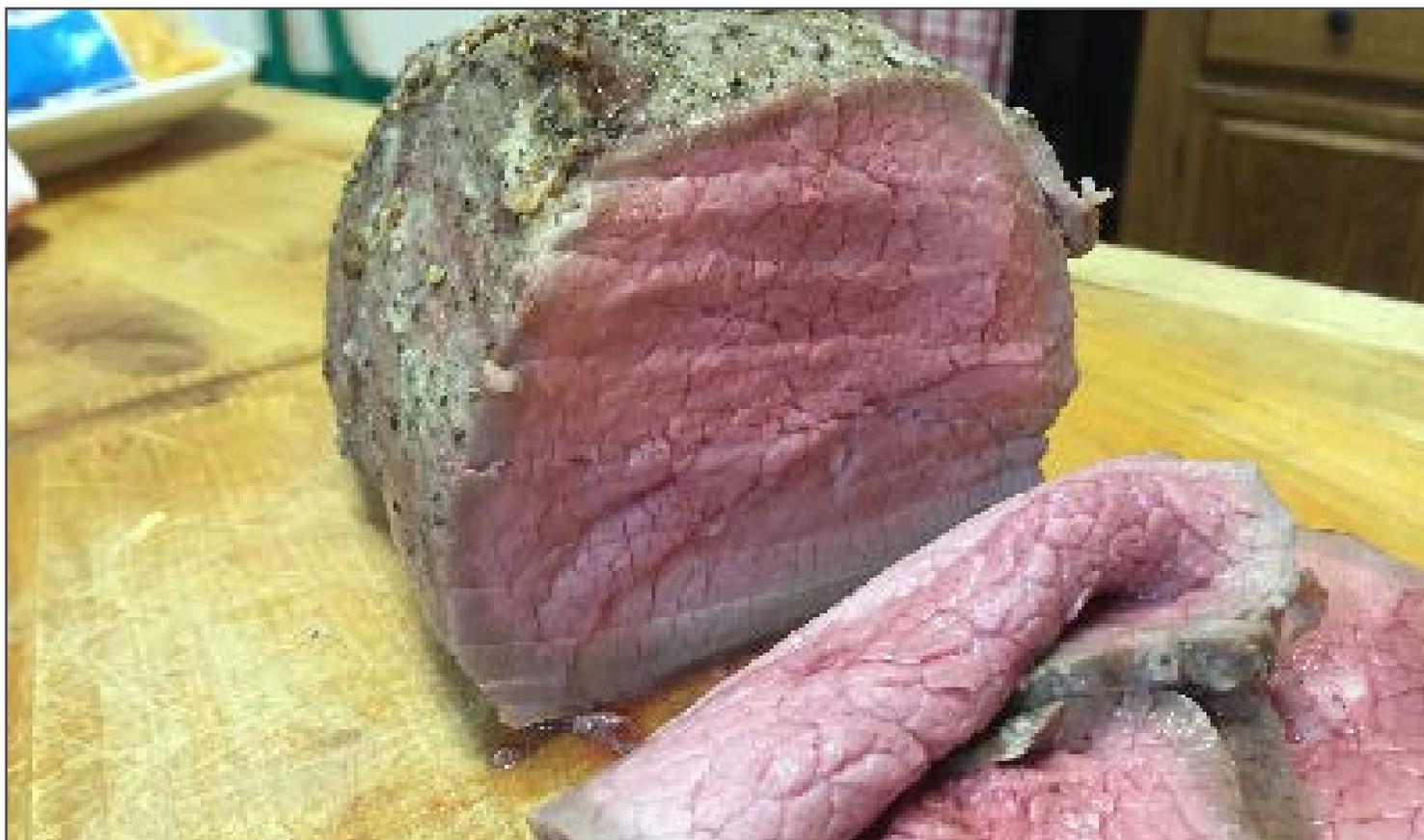


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A New Life

[1 Corinthians 15:12-28](#)

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A New Perspective

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Focal Verse:

“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”

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1 Corinthians 8:9

Introduce

If I had the capital and physical resources to open a store called “No Laughing Matter” which sold only sugar-free and no-sugar-added desserts, I would in response to all the smiles, chuckles, and sometimes outbursts of laughter I have received in restaurants when asking about healthy options based on my diet. Because of chronically severe health problems, I have a very limited and highly restricted diet as many of you may know with whom I’ve had the opportunity to fellowship over a meal. In general, however, I am not a finicky eater, but typically try to eat healthily if I can. So, when I had to cease drinking sodas and stop consuming sugar along with controlling my intake of carbohydrates several years ago, I didn’t have a difficult time. As the expression goes, I quit cold turkey and never looked back. I exercised self-control and have never had the urge to gorge myself on sugary desserts or sodas even if people consumed them in front of me.

So, if I dine with someone, they can feel free to order a dessert. Or, if we are out, they can feel free to stop for ice cream and eat it in front of me. Usually, it seems to prick their conscience more than mine. Some will ask before ordering if I would mind them eating in front of me while others just order and then say, “I wish you could have some of this.”



Yet, I know what will happen should I choose to eat certain things, so I don’t partake. I resist. I don’t want to put myself in a place to jeopardize the remaining health I do have so that I can effectively minister as God has called me as long as He leaves me here on earth.

Yet, suppose for a moment, that I had a weak conscience and lacked self-control. If people ate dessert in front of me or stopped for ice cream, I would feel compelled to partake even though I knew the risk. In fact, I’ve actually eaten with people who have attempted to pressure me to eat something on my restricted list even though they were aware of my health problems. They would start the conversation innocently, “You should try just a little bit.” After I initially refuse, they ratchet up the pressure, “It won’t

Introduce

hurt you to eat this every now and then." Still, I refuse and somehow it almost seems to offend them or hurt their feelings, but I know from experience what will happen so I persist in my refusal. Some people, however, would succumb to this pressure and many would simply partake without giving it a second thought because it's being served right in front of them. If I couldn't control myself, those dining with me should exercise restraint and not order these foods for my sake. Even more importantly, they should never taunt or tempt me to eat something that would harm my health out of respect and love for me.

You may be wondering what all this has to do with Scripture. Paul faced a similar issue in Corinth where some believers ate meat sacrificed to idols which caused other believers to stumble in sin and revert to their former pagan practices! The believers who ate the meat could do so because they knew the idols were powerless; they had the self-control not to resort to participating in the pagan rituals from which they had come. The other group, however, had no such self-control. They mixed their worship of the Lord with pagan ritual! Thus, Paul urged the self-controlled to be mindful or respectful of their brothers and sisters in the church. Rather than create an environment which could bring harm upon them by leading them into temptation and then sin, they should love them enough to refrain from eating the meat altogether. Paul wants us to adopt a new perspective in Christ. Instead of demanding our rights and freedoms, we must care for the spiritual development of fellow believers because we love them and want to see them mature in Christ and not fall away in sin.

Key
Question

What are some areas in which we must exercise restraint so that we don't create an environment where other believers stumble in sin?

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

THE PITFALL OF KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT LOVE:

After dealing with two questions about relationships in chapter 7, Paul now addresses a third question from the Corinthians about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Before we can analyze the passage, we must first understand the historical setting common in the first century, but almost completely foreign to us in the twenty-first century West. As part of pagan ritual, the ancients would offer sacrifices to appease their gods. They would burn or incinerate the inedible portions of the animal on the altar in a religious ceremony, but save the edible portions for consumption later. During an elaborate feast held right there in the temple complex, they would continue cooking some of the edible meat and consume it immediately. Then, they would sell the rest of the meat in the marketplace for people to eat privately in their homes. In cities with large Gentile populations and many temples dedicated to various deities, like Corinth, almost all the meat in the marketplace would have come from such a pagan sacrificial ritual.

For this reason, Christians whom Christ had saved from such a pagan background had a difficult decision to make about whether or not to eat this meat. Three basic questions thus emerge from their struggle with this issue. First, could Christians even purchase sacrificial meat from the marketplace to use privately in their



own homes? Second, could they share a meal at the home of an unbeliever where such meat was served? Third, could they participate in the feasts at the temple often seen as one's civic duty while at the same time "abstaining" from the overtly religious ceremonies honoring the deity? Over the course of the next three chapters, Paul will endeavor to discuss these questions in detail. But first, a modern example from the mission field will put this ancient problem into perspective.

While visiting friends serving as missionaries in a rural part of the Great Rift Valley near Butajira, Ethiopia, I experienced a phenomenon similar to this controversy in first-century Corinth. To help me appreciate the differences in culture, my friends took me

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a supermarket in Adis Abba, the capital city, before making the two-hour journey to their home. In the meat section, I noticed that the various cuts had different stickers on the packaging. My friends explained that both Muslims and Christians employed imams and priests at the slaughterhouse to ensure the animals were dispatched in the appropriate way according to their religious rites. Subsequently, these individuals would also bless the meat with respect to their specific religious practices. Consequently, supermarkets labeled the meat so shoppers could know the difference and buy the “right” cut based on their religious tradition.

With a sharp divide not only between Muslims and Christians, but also with local traditional religions, it had the potential to create chaos in society—especially if one could not determine whether the meat had been properly “blessed” according to the person’s specific religious convictions! For example, the religious background of a restaurant owner would now matter greatly. Muslims could not eat at a Christian-owned restaurant, or at the very least not order meat, and vice versa. The same principle applied to local butcher shops and open-air markets as well. The people must hunt for approved products and know with certainty about the history of the things they sought to consume!

Above all, this posed a significant problem for missionaries. Although from our standpoint it technically didn’t matter what kind of meat they ate because such “blessings” have no bearing on us at all, missionaries would still want to have an open dialogue with everyone about Christ—including wayward Ethiopian Orthodox Christians

who believe that works lead to salvation. Therefore, to eat meat blessed by an imam would offend them and severely limit their potential to discuss the gospel. So, how could one overcome such an obstacle? Out of love and respect, the missionaries could have followed the practices of the particular people group whom they sought to reach so that it didn’t become a hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel. Even though not quite the same as the circumstances in Corinth, this modern practice in Ethiopia still gives us a good idea of what difficulty the church faced **concerning** this issue.

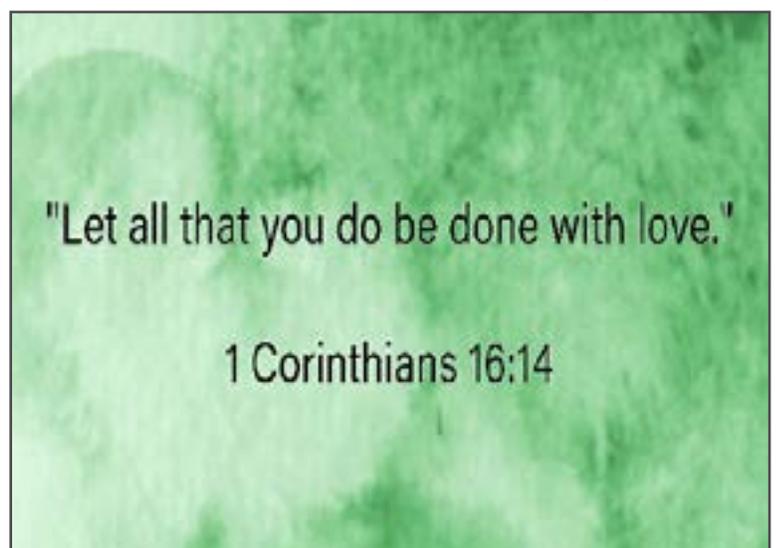


With this background in mind, we can now turn to an examination of Paul's response **concerning the things** [meat] **sacrificed to idols** (v. 1). As he has already done many times throughout this letter, he uses a slogan adopted by the Corinthians to show the error in their thinking. Proudly, the Corinthians proclaimed that they [i.e., **we**] **know that** they [**we**] **all have knowledge**. Yet, Paul corrects them. He points out that **knowledge** has the potential to **puff up** or make one arrogant whereas **love edifies** or builds up. He further criticizes their fraudulent **knowledge** by arguing, "**If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.**" Essentially, Paul derogatorily labels them know-it-alls and then quickly points out that they have deceived themselves. They really don't know as much as they think they do because they don't act in love! One day they will come to understand that true knowledge is predicated upon a love which seeks to build a person and help them mature in Christ rather than thrusting them into tempting situations which may lead to compromise.

At some point in life, most teenagers go through a stage where they believe they know everything. No one can tell them anything because they know best. This often leads them to question authority and challenge their parents. They have no consideration for the circumstances or how their actions may even affect others; they only seek to fulfill their personal desires regardless of the consequences. The Corinthians have this same teenage syndrome where they believe they know everything. In the same way, their **knowledge** has made them arrogant, imbuing them with a sense of superiority so they act without regard to how their actions may affect other believers.

As a result, the Corinthians contend that they have the right to eat the meat sacrificed to idols since it ultimately means nothing in the scope of salvation through Christ and a relationship with the one true God—for they rightly recognized that only one God exists. The pagan idols they once served were only chunks of carved stone

or hunks of precious metal fashioned after some physical image found in creation. They



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could not speak, see, or hear; they were utterly worthless and powerless. Although the Corinthians may have some of the facts correct in this instance, they don't exhibit the right motivation or use discretion when applying this knowledge. While we can confidently know something and stand firm on our convictions, the way we apply that knowledge matters just as much as the content of what we may know.

Hence, Paul reminds them that **if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him** (v. 3). We display our relationship with God through our **love** for one another. After all, Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples" ([John 13:35](#)). Moreover, we can **love** one another precisely because God first demonstrated His **love** for us ([1 John 4:19](#); [Rom 5:8](#)). Therefore, we should not use our **knowledge** to champion our personal freedom or demand our rights. On the contrary, we should use it to build the church which sometimes requires sacrifices and abdicating our personal freedom for the sake of others. However, this type of arrogant "**knowledge**" which the Corinthians displayed leads to the destruction or ruination of others ([8:11](#)). Instead of being characterized by this prideful, arrogant kind of **knowledge**, Christians must be motivated by **love** to do what builds others.

Question
1

For the sake of love, when have you had to make sacrifices in order to build the church and help it to mature?

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

THE PREMINENCE(SUPERIORITY) OF GOD:

Paul does agree with them to some extent that they have the right knowledge, but he disagrees with how they apply it because not everyone in the church has this same knowledge ([8:7](#)). When it comes to **eating** meat sacrificed **to idols**, in theory the Corinthians have the correct understanding! Paul even shares this same knowledge, for he interjects that *we know an idol is nothing* and **there is only one God** (v. 4). In the second part of this declaration, Paul appeals to Israel's statement of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4 known as The *Shema* (meaning "hear" in Hebrew): "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." In a polytheistic culture with many gods like Corinth, this alone would have set Christianity apart. Christians served **one God** who does not dwell in temples made with human hands ([Acts 17:24](#)). He has no carved image made after anything in creation as a representation of His likeness ([Rom 1:23](#)). But rather, God

fashioned man out the dust of the ground after His own image ([Gen 1:27](#)). When it came time to redeem a sinful mankind, God made Himself flesh and dwelt among us so that we might have eternal life ([John 1:14](#)). Even though the world rejected Him and He was sentenced to death in our place, He still offered us salvation as a gracious gift!

To stress how these **idols** don't really exist, Paul refers to them as "**so-called**" **gods** (v. 5). He explains, "For even if there are so-called gods, **whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords)**." This conditional sentence in Greek (i.e., "**even if**") expresses something contrary to fact or reality. However,



Paul isn't expressing doubt or leaving open the possibility that some of these gods may exist as we would tend to understand the phrase **even if**. On the contrary, he denies this possibility altogether by demonstrating how they are merely figments of the imagination of those who worship them. Even though the pagans had numerous physical representations of their gods—to which Paul alludes through the aside **as there are many gods and many lords**—they still didn't exist physically. They only existed in the feeble minds of the worshipers who created them.

Consequently, Paul reiterates that **for us there is one God** (v. 6). We can know for a fact that this **one God** exists because we can see His handiwork through creation. Elsewhere Paul states, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" ([Rom 1:20](#)). Moreover, Paul describes God the Father as the creator or source of all things and Jesus Christ as the agent of creation through which everything came into existence (see [John 1:1-4](#); [Col 1:16](#); [Rom 11:36](#)). Thus, we owe both the physical life we can see and the spiritual life (i.e., salvation) we can have to Christ! Paul's point in illustrating this principle is to demonstrate God's effective power working in the world tangibly as proof for His existence. At this point, he is not attempting to defend the unity or oneness of the Godhead. Rather, he contrasts the power of God the Father and Jesus Christ together with the powerless of

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the many gods and many lords the Gentiles worship to highlight their inexistence.

To further illustrate Paul's point about how God offers tangible evidence of His existence by interacting with His creation while the false gods created according to man's own preferences are powerless to respond, recall the challenge Elijah issued to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel ([1 Kings 18:20-40](#)). Outnumbered 450 to one, Elijah challenged them to select a bull and prepare an altar with wood, but not light it on fire. They must call on their god, Baal, to send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. Ironically, Baal was supposedly the storm god in charge of the weather who should have no problem accomplishing such a feat! Yet, hours later Baal had not answered even though his prophets had begged and prayed profusely for him to act. In the meantime, Elijah had the altar for the Lord repaired and prepared in the same way with one exception. He had trenches dug around it. As an affront to show contempt toward the **so-called** storm god, Elijah commanded that the bull and wood on the altar be soaked three times with four waterpots so that even the trenches became full! In a grand display of His power, God answered Elijah and immediately sent fire from heaven consuming everything! What greater proof could God have offered for His existence than this?

Question
2

To what elements of creation or things in life can you point to illustrate the existence of the one true God and our Savior Jesus Christ?

1 Corinthians 8:7-8

THE PREDICAMENT OF THE CONSCIENCE FOR SOME:

Although many in the Corinthian church may have had this correct understanding about the one God who created the universe, Paul concedes that **not everyone has this knowledge** (v. 7). Yet, we must be clear that Paul is speaking to the believers in Corinth here and not the pagans who worship these false **idols**. So, what does Paul mean that **not** every believer possesses this **knowledge**? He explains that **some, with consciousness of the idol, eat it as a sacrifice to the idol** and because **their conscience is weak**, they are **defiled**. In simple terms, Paul argues that some people in the church are in danger of reverting to the pagan practices which they abandoned for Christ. They are returning to their old lifestyle and mixing it with their

worship of Christ in the present. However, our old life is incompatible with our new life in Christ. We cannot vacillate between the two! God won't tolerate it!

After their conversion, many Christians likely returned to participate in these sacrificial meals offered on behalf of these **idols** because they were so common and integral to social life in the first century. Despite knowing these gods did not exist in any form, many Christians who attended these feasts would revert to their



old habits by participating in much of the excess and debauchery that occurred therein. When they return to the pattern of their old lives by visiting the public temples or attending cultic feasts in private homes, they still engaged in fellowship with the other worshipers and began worshiping the **idols** as though they actually existed. Because the worshipers perceived the god as being present at the meal, every attendee would actively participate in offering the sacrifice to the gods. Even though those Christians who had turned from idolatry may have believed that these **idols** were nothing, they still risked falling back into their old habits by attending these celebrations. For this reason, Paul explicitly forbids eating of idol meat in the temple publicly because it constituted a return to the idolatry which they left ([1 Cor 10:1-22](#)).

Question
3

In what ways does placing ourselves in areas in which we may have once struggled put us at risk spiritually? What are some of those areas for you personally?

Paul describes these at-risk Christians in danger of reverting to their old habits as having a **weak conscience**. This isn't a slight on them nor is it an evaluation of their spiritual maturity, creating a dichotomy between the spiritually mature who can seemingly resist the temptation to return to their old lifestyle and the spiritually immature who can't. On the contrary, such a misguided interpretation comes from a misunderstanding of the term **conscience**. In our modern Western view, the

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conscience functions as a little voice inside our minds where we debate between right and wrong. Cartoons will often illustrate this with a little “devil” and a little “angel” trying to convince the character to act a particular way. In the first century, however, the ancients didn’t view the **conscience** in this way. To them, the conscience was an awareness or “consciousness” of sin. Hence, they perceived the conscience as the ability to distinguish right from wrong—not the debate that occurs about doing one or the other.

In the context of 1 Corinthians, the Christians who attended these sacrificial feasts got so caught up in the moment that they lost awareness of their new identity in Christ. They didn’t even recognize that something was amiss or they were doing something wrong. They blindly went along with the crowd—never once stopping to ponder the danger they faced. However, we cannot use this as an excuse to justify our sin as if we didn’t know! As believers, we know better, but allow our circumstances to dictate our actions. Think about some of the times you have sinned in the past. In the back of your mind, you may have known that the action you undertook was sin, but in the heat of the moment you didn’t stop to contemplate it. Almost automatically and instinctively, you found yourself so engrossed in the circumstances that you didn’t even hesitate. You just did it. Instead of removing yourself from the environment, you allowed the environment to control you and lull you to sleep. You lost consciousness of the person who Christ had made you and you resorted to practicing your former habits.

For us, anger and wrath perhaps best exemplify this lack of spiritual awareness where we lose control and fly into a fit of rage. Let’s as somehow spiritual. Most examples of our anger are not the righteous wrath displayed by Jesus. Scripture clearly attests to the fact that “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God

”(Jas 1:20). Certain environments trigger us. If possible, we need to remove ourselves from them. For instance, watching the idiocy of our world on the news can anger some. This then puts them in a bad mood whereby they lash out at others for no real reason.



In our minds, we may understand that God is in control and will one day establish justice, but we become angry over all the injustice we see right now. The news causes us to lose awareness of the self-control, patience, and love that we should exhibit as a believer and almost spontaneously enrages us.

For the most part, we never intentionally go into a particular setting or situation planning to sin, but in the midst of the circumstances we find ourselves caught up in sin even though we may truly know better. Like a dam which bursts, we get swept away by the resulting flood in the moment only to look back at all the carnage we caused after the wall of water settles down. We can't excuse this as if we couldn't help ourselves because we indeed had a choice. We could have decided beforehand not to put ourselves in that situation and risk the results. The Corinthians faced a similar problem. They theoretically "knew" that **there is only one God**, but their environment caused them to lose awareness and participate in things they now knew to be sinful when they got caught up in the pagan rituals. As a result, they were not actually conscious of all the peril they faced in returning to the idolatry they had left!

Question
4

In what environment(s) can you most easily lose awareness of your identity in Christ and revert to your former sinful habits?

Paul points out that **food** (i.e., meat offered to the idols) **does not commend us to God** (v. 8). **If we eat** it, he continues, **we are neither the better nor if we do not eat it are we worse. Food**, or any physical thing in our world for that matter, has no redeeming value. It is technically neutral. **Food**, particularly the meat sacrificed to idols, has nothing to do with our salvation and our relationship to the Lord. Whether **we eat** certain foods or we don't **neither** saves us **nor** prevents us from being saved. Hence, eating this meat does not give one an advantage nor does it put one at a disadvantage **if** they **do not eat it**. To be clear, Paul is not referring to inherently sinful



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actions—but what we would call the gray areas in life. These actions are not inherently sinful in themselves, but they can lead us to sin if we let our guard down.

For example, watching television or surfing the internet is not inherently wrong. In fact, we can watch some wholesome programs and even find some good biblical teaching which will help us mature in our faith. Although these mediums have no truly redeeming qualities, they do allow us to access information quickly. In a sense, however, they are still neutral. Whether we use them or we don't, they have no bearing on our salvation—only our response to the gospel and Christ do. Even though they may offer a service, they can also become distractions. These seemingly “neutral” objects can lead us astray depending on how we use them. If we become couch potatoes and spend hours aimlessly consumed with these devices, they can become a detriment and distraction to our spiritual development in Christ! If we watch unsavory programming, they can inspire lust or influence the way we talk or act. They can become instruments of sin if we let our guard down and don't take steps to safeguard our hearts and minds because they can cause us to lose awareness of our character in Christ.

Question
5

In life, what “neutral” areas or objects can become the biggest source of distraction in your relationship with Christ?

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

THE NEW PERSPECTIVE WE OUGHT TO HAVE:

Finally, Paul warns them **not** to allow their freedom to **become a stumbling block to those who are weak** (v. 9). As believers, we should act out of love and not some type of “arrogant” knowledge (8:2-3). We must be careful that our actions don't lead others to relapse into the former life from which Christ has graciously saved them and lead them to sin. To stress this point, Paul asks a rhetorical question, “**For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the consciousness of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things also**” (v. 10)? To this, Paul adds a second question: “Should **the weak brother, for whom Christ died, be destroyed because of your knowledge**” (v. 11)? If an action causes a **brother** or sister in Christ to **sin**—leading them to ruination—we shouldn't do it even if it does not

constitute **sin** for us at the time. We must have a community mindset instead of demanding our personal rights and freedoms. Like Christ, we should always think about how our actions affect others ([Phil 2:1-4](#)).

Paul highlights the serious nature of this problem by revealing that **when you sin thus against** other believers **and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ** (v. 11). Paul is straightforward. To cause a brother or sister in Christ to relapse into their former lifestyle of **sin** is also a **sin** itself! Therefore, we ought to consider very carefully what Christ would have us do on matters of personal choice. Just because we can do something doesn't mean it is the best option and we should. If we cause someone else to sin, it becomes sin for us too! For this reason, Paul declares that he **will never again eat meat** sacrificed to idols **if it makes** fellow Christians **stumble** (v. 12). Instead, he will relinquish his own personal freedom and abstain for their sakes in order to help them mature in Christ.

This advice conflicts with our culture's view. Our culture would assert that we have the right to do whatever we want regardless of the effect it has on other people. They would further claim that we are not responsible for another's behavior, arguing that we did not "force" or coerce someone to make a personal choice. At the same time, many in



our culture refuse to take responsibility for their actions, so they excuse themselves by exclusively blaming others. In a sense, both viewpoints have *some* truth in them, but they fail to communicate the totality of God's truth found in Scripture. In reality, both parties share responsibility for their actions based upon Paul's remarks here. Although we are not solely responsible for the choices other people may make, God will hold us accountable if our actions cause others to **stumble** and **sin**. Likewise, God will also hold the person accountable for their own choices because it led them to choose **sin**.

Scripture, for example, advises us to dress modestly as befitting of our relationship with the Lord ([1 Tim 2:9-10](#)). For the sake of this illustration, let's expand this a bit. Certainly, this would include tight-fitting or revealing clothing, but also t-shirts with

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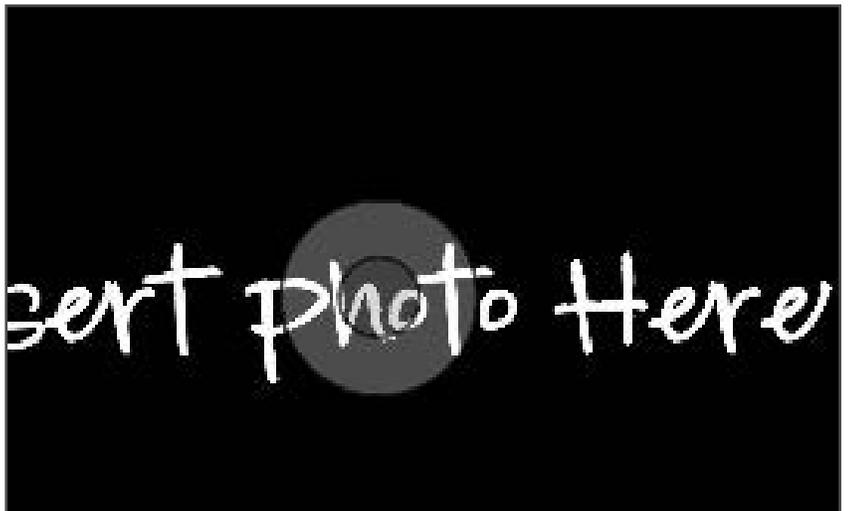
risqué wording or vulgar slang that most may consider amusing, but not offensive. As an example, my parents wisely wouldn't let me wear a shirt that said "Practice Safe Sax" designed by members of the alto saxophone section of my high school band because of what it implied. Nevertheless, our society would balk at this. They would contend that we can wear whatever we want. If our outfit causes someone to lust even if we may not consider it "inappropriate," they would decry, "That's not on you. *They* shouldn't lust. You're not responsible for *their* choice." God, however, says, "Wait a minute. Think about the other person. Don't selfishly demand *your* rights." If we knowingly cause them to **sin** by our actions especially if we keep doing it after it comes to our attention, we are partially responsible. We have sinned by causing them to **stumble** and **sin**. Scripture declares this loudly and clearly!

Question
6

What other activities, actions, or things can pose a risk of causing someone to stumble and revert to their former lifestyle of sin?

In addition, another area of contention which the principle in this chapter governs is the consumption of alcohol. Scripture strongly condemns drinking in excess and drunkenness ([Prov 23:20-21, 31-35](#); [Gal 5:21](#); [Rom 13:13](#); [Eph 5:18](#)). It clearly identifies it as a sin ([1 Cor 6:10](#)) because it leads to immorality and debauchery ([Gen 9:20-26](#); [19:30-38](#)). Moreover, it never satisfies so we crave more usually leading to excess ([Eccl 2:3](#))—only Christ can truly satisfy our deepest needs by filling us with His presence ([Eph 5:18](#))! At the same time, Scripture does record people drinking wine and using it for medicinal purposes ([1 Tim 5:23](#)). In this lesson, we won't be able to cover this issue sufficiently from every angle in one week. So, I will introduce the topic and re-visit it where appropriate as we discuss chapters 9 and 10. For now, we will summarize the topic and the position we hold as a church based upon the application of this passage.

When it comes to alcohol, most people cannot exercise self-control and stop before becoming



drunk. Most cannot drink one or two glasses and call it quits; they drink to excess. Even then, the effect of the alcohol depends upon a number of other factors, including the proof or percentage of alcoholic content in the beverage as well as the body type of the person consuming it. Moreover, many people are also predisposed to alcoholism genetically. According to secular research published by the National Library of Medicine on the propensity for alcoholism, "Twin studies in the US and Europe suggest that approximately 45-65% of the liability is due to genetic factors."* Most people don't set out to become alcoholics, but even one drink for a person with a hereditary disposition puts them at grave risk! To consume even one drink for more than half the population would greatly increase the likelihood of alcoholism.

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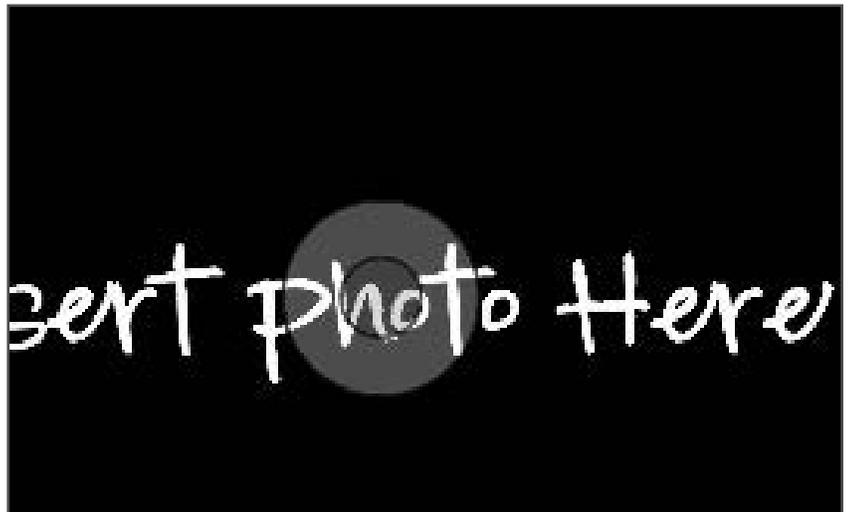
Howard J. Edenberg and Tatiana Foroud, "Genetics and Alcoholism," in the National Review Gastroenterol Hepatol (Aug 1, 2014), available from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>.

In itself, alcohol has no redeeming qualities. In the same study mentioned above, the researchers found that "alcohol is widely consumed, but excessive use creates serious physical, psychological, and social problems and contributes to many diseases."* Alcohol destroys relationships, harms, productivity, and even kills. But one may argue, that it only does this when used excessively leading to drunkenness. To which I would reply, "How do you know you're not one of the 45-65% of people with the gene for alcoholism?" One drink may lead to a lifetime of regret and dysfunction. The only way not to find out is abstinence! Moreover, I also bid you to think about your fellow believers. What about those who have had a problem with alcoholism, but God has saved them from it? By drinking, our consumption of alcohol may create a bad example and a poor environment, causing them to revert to their former lifestyle. It can only take one bad decision and one drink to **stumble**.

When we drink just like anything else we put ahead of Christ, we push Him out of our lives by allowing another substance to control us. Furthermore, we lose control of our faculties and minds—and no longer can we glorify the Lord in such a condition. Whether little or much, alcohol never truly satisfies. For this reason, Paul urges us not to be drunk with wine which leads to immorality, but filled with the Holy Spirit

(Eph 5:18). Based on this overview, out of love and respect for those in the church, we should refrain from drinking any alcohol. We should drink no alcohol at all because it could cause someone else to **stumble** and succumb to a lifestyle of drunkenness and debauchery. By setting an example that causes someone else to **sin**, we have now sinned **against Christ** ourselves! Therefore, let us share Paul's perspective in verse 12 adapted to this example: **If drinking alcohol makes my brother or sister stumble, I will never again drink lest it cause them to sin.** Our church's position, therefore, is this position clearly stated in Scripture!

If any of these illustrations or topics offended you this week, whether about modest clothing, alcohol, or anything else, you must ask yourself, "Why?" Even though we may have the freedom to do something, it doesn't always benefit us or serve the purpose of the Lord to do so. What's more important



to you: to get your way and have your freedom or to make a sacrifice that glorifies the Lord for the good of others in the church? If we insist on demanding our rights and exercising our freedom at the expense of others in the kingdom, we don't exhibit the love and selflessness to which Christ has called us. And this is the very same problem with which Paul dealt in the Corinthian church some 1,975 years ago! God has called us to have a new perspective in Christ. He wants us to care for one another and grow together so we can advance the gospel into a lost culture. Rather than giving our preferences and opinions on a specific issue, let us ask, "Does what I am doing glorify the Lord and build up the people in his church?"

Question
7

How do you demonstrate this new perspective to which God has called us in your daily life and service of Christ?

How many of us would be able to resist eating sugar-loaded desserts if everyone at the table, except us, ordered one? How many would be able to continue abstaining if the people with whom we ate pressured us to take a little bit or get a dessert for ourselves? Probably, not many of us could answer with an affirmative, “I can.” For health reasons, however, many people need to have strict diets and eat more healthily to control chronic problems like diabetes and high blood pressure. Most likely, if someone we loved had such a problem, we would put forth an effort to help them achieve success. We would sacrifice our own freedoms and abstain from desserts altogether. Or we would make something sugar-free or with no sugar added to share with them. We certainly wouldn’t callously eat in front of them or heinously pressure them to eat a dessert. If we did, we would knowingly compromise their long-term health. If we do these things, on the other hand, we must re-evaluate why we do them and what purpose it serves.

When it comes to personal matters of preference and freedom in the church, we must have the same perspective. We must abstain from those things which may cause people to stumble and sin. Moreover, we should never create an environment in which fellow believers feel tempted or even pressured to join in something that may cause them to revert to their former life apart from Christ. Yet, often in the church, we see individuals demanding their rights and flaunting their freedoms to the detriment of others. This should never be! This isn’t something unique to our modern Western culture of individualism, but rather it exemplifies sinful human nature. In Christ, God has called us to a new perspective—one where we strive to glorify Him while demonstrating care for other people instead of selfishly seeking what benefits us. Have you adopted this new perspective?

Incorporate

When you realize something in which you have participated has caused another believer to stumble and sin, what is your first reaction or response? What should it be based on this passage?

Ask yourself honestly, is there anything at all in my life that I would continue doing or refuse to give up for the sake of another believer? Why or why not? What does such a refusal say about one's relationship with Christ?

Why must we be careful not to confuse sin and the so-called gray areas of life? How do you distinguish between the two? According to this passage, when do those gray or neutral areas become sin for us?

Journal: Document God's Work

April 13, 2025



A New Sacrifice From An Age-old Promise

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Focal Verse:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

1 Corinthians 15:3

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On Tuesday April 15, the federal government has mandated that we file our taxes and pay what we owe. Hopefully, most of us “overpaid” through the amount withdrawn from our paychecks and will receive a refund. But most likely many of us must pay the government more money even though we try to itemize and legally deduct every cent we possibly can. Our income credits and deductions, especially if we don’t have children living at home, hardly ever surpass what the government specifies we owe. Whether filing online or sending it through the mail to Austin, we must make arrangements to pay either through an automated bank withdrawal by providing our account information or by enclosing a check with the filing we mailed. The IRS may have some leniency and offer monthly payment plans provided that we make these arrangements before the deadline. However, they won’t take kindly to an IOU or a failure to pay. They want their money.

Suppose, for a moment, you dotted every I and crossed every T, but you still owed an eye-popping amount that you could never repay on your own—even with monthly payments as an option. Borrowing would send you into even greater debt and still not resolve your problem. Still, the IRS wouldn’t relent in their demand for restitution. They would garnish your wages and eventually send agents to collect the money or initiate criminal proceedings against you. In the course of talking to one of your friends, however, he offers to pay your debt. So, he writes a check for the amount owed and expedites it to the IRS office on your behalf. Relieved and grateful, you thank your friend and go back to life as normal.

After a while, however, you begin receiving official notices in the mail demanding payment for the amount you owed. But you know for sure your friend had paid it, so you toss the letters aside and pay them little attention. In a few more weeks, you hear a thunderous pounding on your front door. Peering through your peep hole, you see two people dressed in black suits. Beyond them along the curb, you also see a black suburban with government-issued plates parked. Trepidatiously, you open the door and ask, “May I help you?” In an authoritative voice, one of them announces their names and shows you his badge before declaring that they have come on behalf of the Internal Revenue Service. The other person then hands you official documentation citing your failure to pay your taxes with the exact amount you owed to the penny along with a warrant signed by a local judge. After staring at the documents for a brief moment, you begin to explain that your friend had paid the amount. You had seen

Introduce

him write the check, seal it in the envelope, and mail it. Your friend's bank had even received confirmation that the check had been cashed and deposited by the IRS! So, you exclaim, "How can this be possible? There must be some mistake."

The IRS agent calmly responds, "There's been no mistake. We did receive your friend's check in the mail, but we had to credit the funds towards his own account against the debt he himself owed." The agent continued to explain, "He couldn't pay your debt until he had first completely settled his own. Like you, he had a debt that he could never repay." In life, we have a much bigger debt than even this—one we could also never repay on our own. We can't pay it through our good works, by generally being a "good" person, or by participating in certain "religious" activities. No one on earth could pay this debt for us either because all have sinned ([Rom 3:23](#)) and everyone must pay his or her own debt first—death ([Rom 6:23](#)). So, are we hopelessly doomed with no way to free ourselves from this burdensome debt?

Fortunately, in His grace and love, God sent His Son to earth to pay this debt for us. Perfectly holy never once having sinned, Jesus Himself had no debt to pay so He could effectively pay ours ([2 Cor 5:21](#); [Heb 4:15](#)). Consequently, He laid down His life, dying on the cross so that He might freely give His life in exchange for ours! From the dawn of creation, God the Father knew that only one sacrifice could ever satisfy the penalty for our sin and overcome its guilt ([Eph 1:3-14](#)). It wasn't the blood of mere bulls and goats, but the blood of His faithful and obedient Son ([Heb 10:1-10](#); [Phil 2:8](#)). Today, on Palm Sunday, we remember this new sacrifice which God sent based on an age-old promise! This week approximately 2,000 years ago, Jesus, a perfect sacrifice, died in our place and three days later God bodily raised Him from the dead as a guarantee of life for everyone who would turn from his sin and surrender to Him.

Key
Question

Have you received eternal life through the debt that Jesus paid for you or are you attempting to pay the debt on your own?

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

THE PREACHING OF SALVATION:

Although we will return to our sequential examination of 1 Corinthians resuming with a study of chapter 9, for the rest of April we will skip forward to chapter 15 because the subject matter speaks of the events we will remember and celebrate as a church in the coming weeks. There, Paul focuses on Jesus' resurrection and its implications for the church—not because the Corinthians had a question about it like the other issues on which they had written him, but because they had grossly misunderstood it. Most disconcertedly, this misunderstanding threatened the very foundation of **the gospel** itself. And it was most likely the source of many of the problems in their church. Offering proof for the historical, bodily resurrection of Christ, therefore, Paul demonstrates how our Savior's resurrection foreshadows and serves as a guarantee of our own in the last days yet to come.

The Corinthians perhaps rejected the idea of bodily resurrection because they thought that they had already received their spiritual bodies and their current physical existence would end in destruction. This solely "spiritual" resurrection made them perfect in the present by endowing them with superior



"knowledge" and giving them unbridled freedom which they would use to engage in pleasure since for them this life was as good as it will ever get. For example, recall their earlier declaration that they used to excuse their sexual immorality: "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both" ([1 Cor 6:13](#)). With this fatalist mentality, the Corinthians believed they should enjoy the pleasures of life now while they can because only destruction awaits after this. For this reason, they subscribed to the theory that they should eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow they die ([Ecc 7:2-3](#); [8:15](#)).

Since some of the Corinthians denied the bodily resurrection of believers in favor of a "spiritual" resurrection which occurs wholly in the present, they have denied Jesus'

bodily resurrection by implication. Although they may not have denied his resurrection outrightly, the distorted mode and manner in which they argued it occurred created huge problems for **the gospel**. His bodily resurrection serves as the foundation of **the gospel**. Our salvation depends upon it! If Jesus did not rise from the dead bodily, then Christianity is meaningless and worthless—no better than any other man-made religion or philosophy. As we have seen evidenced repeatedly throughout this letter, the Corinthians had become sidetracked, so engrossed in their own individual pursuits that they had forgotten the significance of **the gospel** (v. 1). They had failed to grasp its power to save as well as transform because they focused on exploiting their so-called privileged position in the present to practice pleasure rather than prepare themselves by maturing in their faith while waiting for the coming kingdom of God.

Question
1

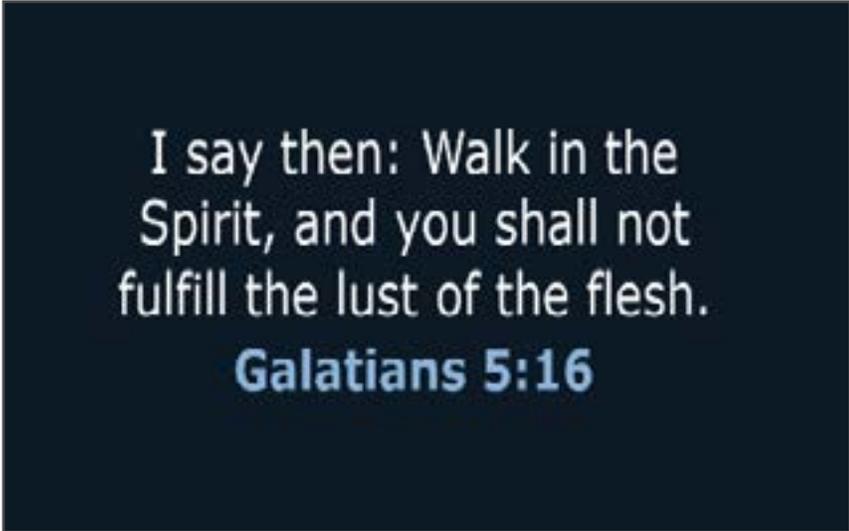
What cultural practices, principles, or philosophies today have the propensity to obscure or overshadow our understanding of the gospel?

Because of this confusion about the resurrection, Paul must now re-teach the content of **the gospel** almost as if they had not yet heard it at all. He thus again declares **the gospel to** them **which** he had **preached to** them **and which** they had **received** and on **which** they **stand** (v. 1). The word translated **I declare** literally means “I make known,” but in this context conveys more the sense of “I remind you.” Here, Paul speaks somewhat sarcastically because the Corinthians have confidently asserted that they are wise and have this knowledge ([1 Cor 1:18-31](#)), but in reality they don’t ([1 Cor 4:6-13](#)). If they had this knowledge, they would have wisely displayed it by living a life conformed to Christ. Regardless, this message isn’t something they’re hearing for the first time! They have already **received** it and accepted (i.e., **stand**) it. Although they may know it cognitive or mentally, they haven’t made it the cornerstone of



their lives by practicing its principles even though they may say they do! For the most part, the transformative power of **the gospel** was not evident in their daily lives and had no effect upon them.

To illustrate how the Corinthians had this knowledge about the gospel and resurrection, but didn't apply it to their lives, consider the safety protocol we should practice when handling raw meats like poultry and pork. Certainly, we must thoroughly cook the product to the correct



I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
Galatians 5:16

internal temperature so we don't risk becoming sick or worse. At the same time, we must also practice good hygiene by washing our hands after touching the raw meat as well as thoroughly cleaning both the area and utensils we used in preparing the dish. We know the danger that a lack of cleanliness imposes! We probably can even name serious bacterial infections like e-coli and salmonella that could result from improperly handling or consuming undercooked poultry products. Some of us may even be able to cite instances of food poisoning we have experienced ourselves or seen first-hand.

But this knowledge sometimes doesn't translate into action. It doesn't affect the way we live. It's just knowledge that we have stored in our minds somewhere! Instead of using it to benefit our lives, we continue our old habits and careless practices that can result in disease and death. After handling raw poultry, for example, some of us may not consciously think about all the consequences of our actions. Without washing our hands first, we may open the door to the refrigerator, cabinet, or drawer. We may pick up the saltshaker or bottles of spices to season the meat. We may slide the dishes and utensils into the sink, but then forget to clean the countertop. Even if we do wash our hands, we may smash down on the soap dispenser nozzle with the dirty palm of our hand or grab the faucet with our fingers instead of using the back of our hands which have not been contaminated. We know better, but we do some of these things anyway despite the potential risks! Concerning the belief in **the gospel** and bodily resurrection, the Corinthians faced the same problem. They had heard the content of **the gospel** and accepted it, but it really didn't translate into their actions.

The Corinthians continued participating in the things that led to destruction and death rather than life!

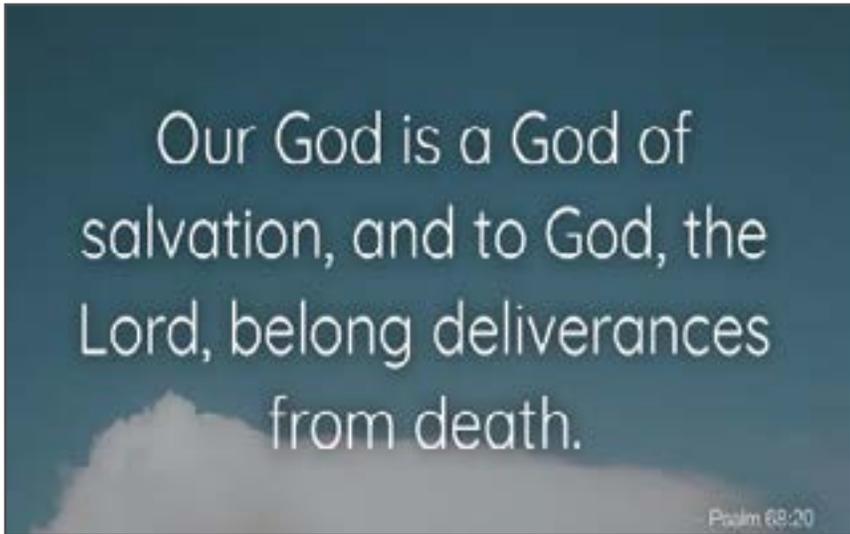
Question
2

After prayer, what areas has perhaps God shown you that you may have “knowledge,” but you haven’t really applied that knowledge in the way you live or do ministry?

Paul now stresses the importance of not only understanding **the gospel**, but also applying it since salvation comes only through the hearing of its message (v. 2). Notice how the Apostle uses the present tense to describe their salvation—**you are saved**—rather than you were saved in the past tense. We, however, almost universally speak of our salvation in the past tense—was or were saved—but Scripture generally speaks of it in the present tense to emphasize the current transformation it brings. Although receiving the forgiveness of Christ by turning from our sins is a one-time event, the life-changing effects of **the gospel** are on-going in the present! Let this be a challenge to us to view our salvation in the present instead of something in the distant past that God will fulfill only in the distant future when He calls us home to heaven. God is fulfilling that promise of salvation to us in the present—right now—if we would only look at the work He is doing in our lives at the moment!

Rather than talking about what God did for us exclusively in the past when He “saved” us, let us strive daily to show what God is currently doing in our lives in the present so others can see the visible testimony of this transformation applied. May we speak of the things that God is teaching us, showing us, and

doing through us in our lives right now—today! Salvation is not primarily a gracious gift whereby we can escape death and have life. Eternal life spent with God certainly is one of the benefits of this new life we now have. However, the primary benefit of this



Our God is a God of
salvation, and to God, the
Lord, belong deliverances
from death.

Psalms 68:20

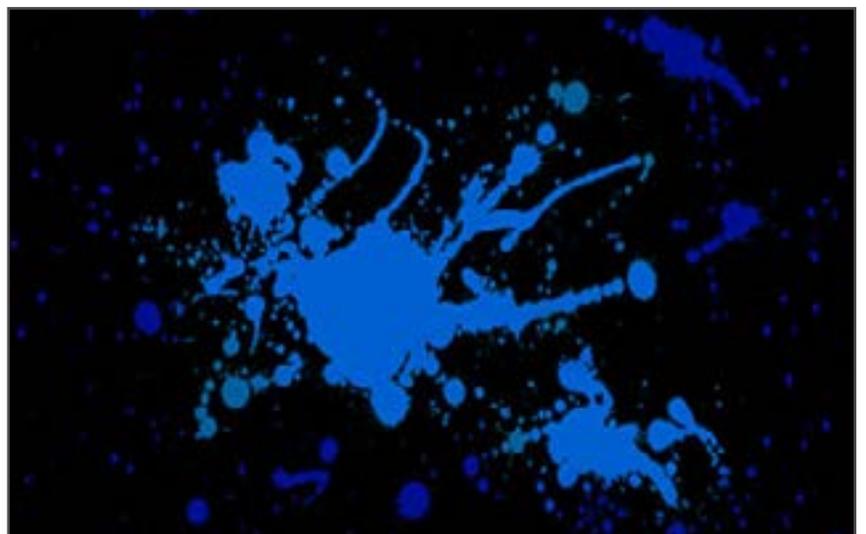
new life is the freedom and ability we now have to live life to the fullest potential just the way God had designed it from the very beginning before sin entered the world.

Question
3

To what activities can you point right now within the last day or week to show what God is doing currently? in ministry?

Consequently, Paul urges us to examine the genuineness of our beliefs by looking at the effect they have on our behavior or actions. His interjection “**if you hold fast**” doesn’t call into question the power of **the gospel** to save, but rather it becomes the tool by which we can test the genuineness of our faith. Thus, evidence of our salvation should exist in how we now live according to the principles of **the gospel** through what we do, say, and think. If we cannot cite any evidence of transformation, however, it could clearly indicate that we have **believed in vain**. This doesn’t mean that we can lose our salvation. On the contrary, it signifies that we should be able to point to verifiable, tangible changes in our actions. Our behavior should reflect the character and righteousness of Christ. If someone cannot point to any specific transformation that **the gospel** has produced within him and the Holy Spirit does not discipline or convict him when he sins, then he has not actually **received the gospel** of Christ. In other words, that person has never been saved because he never truly believed in the first place or there would have been evidence in the way he lived! A relationship with Christ will always produce life-change without exception!

With the advent of modern technology using ultraviolet lighting, such as the black light, we can observe substances, stains, and bacteria not normally visible to the human eye. Suppose you use a black light to test the cleanliness of your kitchen after preparing the poultry products to which we referred earlier. No



matter how clean we may consider ourselves to be, the black light will probably reveal

Instruct

a scene of horror and disgust with almost every surface in our kitchen having some kind of substance on it which we had not yet seen. We can respond to this scenario in a couple of ways. On one hand, we can immediately get a bottle of bleach or some kind of disinfectant and begin cleaning to remove the stains because we feel disgusted and convicted about the condition of our kitchen. On the other hand, we could ignore the problem and blow it off saying, "It's not that bad." We don't feel compelled to clean because we know it will just get dirty again. We know it's a never-ending battle that cannot be won, so we settle for a dirty kitchen and hope for the best.

People have a similar response to the black light of **the gospel** which reveals the hidden stains of sin in our lives. Although we cannot remove the stain of sin on our own, we know a Savior who can. But we must allow Him access to cleanse this stain of sin from our lives. Some people will grant Christ this access immediately and allow Him to do the work of cleaning them. On the other hand, some refuse. They may recognize the problem of sin in their lives, but they claim, "It's not that bad." They may even view it as a lost cause because they know they will just get "dirty" again, so they settle for a mediocre life of sin headed for destruction and hope for the best. Nevertheless, as believers, we need Christ constantly shining the black light of the gospel on our lives so that we can live according to the righteous transformed walk to which He has called us.

Question
4

What would a black light reveal on your life about your current standing with Christ? in ministry?

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

THE PROMISE IN SCRIPTURE:

Having reminded the Corinthians that he has already preached the gospel to them, Paul now explains where we find this promise of salvation spelled out in Scripture to which he now appeals as confirmation for the content of his message. He hadn't concocted this message on his own. Nor had he received it from the tradition or philosophy of other men. But rather, he **delivered** or passed on what he had **received** directly from the Lord Himself through **the Scriptures** (v. 3). Elsewhere when people challenged the validity of the gospel, Paul also recognized the divine source of its message, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus" ([Gal 1:12](#)). Scripture must serve as the lone basis for all our beliefs since it is God's divinely inspired Word communicated directly to us without error. Our opinions and personal preferences don't matter. If what we believe or practice conflicts with Scripture, we stand in opposition to God Himself.

The gospel is a single story with two parts fulfilled by one Person—Jesus. First, the Scriptures reveal that Christ died for our sins. While we can't appeal to one solitary reference or quotation alone as evidence, the whole of Scripture offers overwhelming support for this claim! The penalty for sin required death. Only an unblemished, perfect sacrifice could satisfy that requirement by substituting its life in the place of the sinner. Even so, the sacrificial system of animals introduced in Leviticus was only designed to be temporary and was really imperfect because it had to be repeated yearly, serving only as a reminder of sin and not removing ([Heb 10:3-4](#)). No mere animal sacrifice could effectively remove the stain of sin because it couldn't transform the heart. Therefore, this now-antiquated sacrificial system always looked forward to the coming of One greater who could remove sin once-and-for-all ([Heb 10:10](#)).

Question
5

If asked to distinguish Christianity from every other world religion, what would you say? How would you then offer proof that we can know for sure Christianity is the right way?

The New Testament didn't make these claims alone, however; the Old Testament laid the foundation when describing how the Seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent in a reference to the final defeat of sin ([Gen 3:15](#)). In the eyes of the

world, however, this would look like defeat because it would require the death of the Seed. But God had planned this from the very beginning ([Eph 1:3-14](#)). When God made His covenant with Abraham, He knew that on his own His servant would fail to “be a blessing” to all the nations, thereby breaking his end of the bargain ([Gen 12:2e](#)). So, when God came in a vision to ratify the covenant, He alone bore the responsibility for bringing it to fruition despite Abraham’s failure. With the sacrificial animals splayed open on the ground, God passed among them as a “smoking oven” and “burning torch.” Typically, both parties participating in the covenant would pass between these sacrifices, signifying the death penalty for the one who might dare to transgress or break it. In this case, however, only God passed between them. Thus, God took Abraham’s place, ultimately foreshadowing the death He would have to die on His servant’s behalf for his inability to keep the covenant ([Gen 15:1-17](#)). Literally, as God walked through the middle of those sacrifices, He declared to Abraham, “I’ll take the penalty of your sin by dying in your place.”

This set in motion Jesus’ need to become flesh so that He could overcome our inability to satisfy the requirements of the law perfectly. The prophet Isaiah, therefore, tells of One who would come through the lineage of David ([Isa 9:1-6](#); [11:1](#)) who could save not only Israel but also the entire world ([Rom 2:11-16](#)) and establish His kingdom where He would reign in righteousness forever ([2 Sam 7:12-14](#)). Perhaps, there is no greater picture of the fate of this Messiah whom God would send on this occasion than Isaiah 52:13-53:12 which describes how He would bear the sins of the world through His death! For instance, Isaiah 53:5 asserts, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

Moreover, Isaiah 53:7 specifically describes Jesus “as a lamb [led] to the slaughter.” Announcing the arrival of this Messiah, John the Baptist recognized this unique role of Jesus when He exclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” ([John 1:29](#)). No other sacrifice would do; nothing else could



remove the sin of the world and transform people's heart to walk in righteousness. God Himself had to come to do this job as He foreshadowed long ago in nascent human history. Yet, this was no ordinary death, but the most excruciating and heinous form of death ever imagined by humans. Even before Jesus was nailed to the cross for our sins, He endured hours of beatings and torture. A servant of the high priest slapped Jesus, Roman soldiers beat and spat upon Him, He received lashings by whips that would normally kill men, they placed a crown of thorns upon His head, and they forced Him to carry His cross to the place of crucifixion, but He could not in His weakened condition. Nonetheless, Jesus who knew no sin died on the cross that day because of our sins ([2 Cor 5:21](#))!

Question
6

What effect has Jesus' death had on your life personally? How can you quantify that in tangible ways? To what evidence can you point to show the effect?

Years ago, famed radio broadcaster Paul Harvey would begin his nightly broadcast with the tagline, "And now for the rest of the story." Fortunately, **the Scriptures** give us a second part to this story; it didn't end in the death of the protagonist, for this would have left us without hope and devoid of life ([1 Cor 5:12-17](#)). On the contrary, Scripture declares that Jesus **was buried** and then He triumphantly **rose again on the third day** (v. 4). No other person could have done this nor any other sacrifice fulfill this mission! To this day, no one has bodily resurrected from the dead to live forever and never die again. Jesus certainly revived or resuscitated people from the dead like Lazarus ([John 11:43](#)), but they only lived a while longer and died once again. Jesus' resurrection differed from any other resuscitation because it was permanent. Consequently, it serves as a guarantee of our own bodily resurrection in the last days when Jesus will return to establish His kingdom in full ([1 Cor 15:20](#)).

Just as Scripture foretold of Jesus' death, it also foretells of His resurrection. Psalm 16:10, for example, proclaims, "For You will not leave My soul in Sheol [i.e., the grave] nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption [i.e., decay]." In other words, the psalmist emphasizes that Jesus' body would not remain in the grave long enough to start decomposing, but He would gloriously burst forth in new life having defeated sin and death permanently. Hence, Paul highlights the resurrection as occurring **on**

the third day—Sunday morning. Jewish tradition recognized that they body would start to decompose after three days, but three days in the tomb would also sufficiently prove that a person had actually died. There was no mistake. Jesus had truly died that Friday afternoon on the cross, but His body had not yet begun to decompose. **On that third day**, Jesus triumphantly vacated the tomb just as He had promised He would! In a debate with Jewish leaders, Jesus once declared, “Destroy this temple [His body] and in three days I will raise it up” ([John 2:19-20](#)). Jesus fulfilled the promise of Scripture and in doing so He brought life to all those who would receive Him—including the Corinthians!

1 Corinthians 15:5-8

THE PROOF ABOUT THE SAVIOR:

In addition to the promises God has penned in Scripture, He has also offered external proof that He has fulfilled them. Today, people will often make accusations without any proof. Unfortunately, many people believe these accusations because it fits their narrative and the things they want to hear. But when we ask for proof, they can't offer any. They merely repeat the accusation as if it constitutes proof just by saying it. God, however, backs up His promises with tangible proof which we can see! God didn't just promise to raise Jesus from the dead spiritually or figuratively, but bodily ([John 2:19](#)). And He offered proof—the empty tomb along with the folded head scarf and burial linens as the only things that remained ([Matt 28:9](#); [Luke 24:30](#); [John 20:17, 20, 27](#)). Moreover, Jesus didn't secretly rise from the dead only leaving an empty tomb for his followers and the world to wonder what had happened. He appeared to people numerous times, over many days, and in various locations—including those who had rejected His Messianic claims like **James**.

To substantiate this proof, Paul appeals to eyewitness testimony—those who had first-hand experience interacting with the risen Lord. Although Paul begins with Peter and doesn't mention Jesus' appearance to the women at the garden tomb



([John 20:11-18](#)), it doesn't mean that he didn't know about the testimony or somehow discounted it since testimony by women was inadmissible in court as evidence at that time. Rather, he may have simply recorded eyewitness accounts which he had heard personally directly from the source. Regardless, Paul reports that Jesus was seen by **Cephas** (Peter) and **then by the twelve** (v. 5). Again, we must recognize that Paul is seeking to summarize the evidence not to give an exhaustive list in chronological order. Although **the twelve** collectively refers to the disciples as a group, it doesn't necessarily mean altogether at the same time—for Judas certainly would not have been present after the events of his betrayal. Nevertheless, Jesus appeared to all eleven of the remaining disciples at some point over the next forty days whether collectively to many at once like in the upper room with 120 others or later individually in more private settings like when He sought to dispel Thomas' doubt.

Paul also relates that Jesus appeared to **over 500 brethren at once** (v. 6). Nowhere else in Scripture records an appearance to such a large group, but it most likely corresponds to those who had gathered for Jesus' final instructions immediately prior to His ascension to heaven. To substantiate his claim, Paul reports that **the greater part** of this group remains alive in the **present** even though some had **fallen asleep** or died. For those Corinthians who had dismissed the resurrection as merely spiritual and not physical, Paul bids them to go and ask those who have first-hand knowledge. They can go and ask the eyewitnesses themselves. Even today, our court system values eyewitness testimony especially when multiple witnesses can corroborate details of the event. Here, Paul has given them a multitude of people they can ask that were there and saw it with their own eyes! It should leave no doubt among them as to the validity of the event and the veracity or truthfulness of the gospel.

Question
7

Even though we cannot “ask” eyewitnesses directly about their testimony, to what can we appeal that demonstrates the validity and truthfulness of the resurrection?

Furthermore, Jesus didn't just appear to those with whom He had a close, personal relationship during His approximately three-year ministry. He appeared to those who had rejected Him; they didn't believe in Him and some actually sought to persecute those who followed Him. For example, Jesus appeared to His half-brother

Instruct

James (v. 7; see [John 7:2-9](#)). This appearance radically changed James' life and he began following Christ, becoming a key leader in the Jerusalem church. **Then**, Paul notes that Jesus appeared to **all the apostles**. This is a wider group of people than **the twelve** who would eventually become significant leaders and figures in the early church ([Acts 1:6-11, 21-22](#)).

Finally, Paul gives his own personal testimony about the events on the road to Damascus where Jesus appeared to him physically. Paul describes this event as being **born out of due time** (v. 8). The Greek word **born out of due time** refers to any premature birth, miscarriage, or abortion. In other words, Paul describes himself as being "abnormally born." From Paul's perspective, Jesus' appearance to him and his subsequent salvation occurred long after these other initial appearances, for Christ had already ascended to heaven. Yet, this dramatic event so long in coming radically changed the trajectory of Paul's life. His life did a 180 from a persecutor of Christ to being persecuted for the cause of Christ and the sake of the gospel. Although he once vehemently and violently fought against Christ, Jesus still saw fit to save him and use him. Because of his sordid background, Paul considered himself the least of all the apostles, but was amazed that God would still seek to use him even in his weakness (see [1 Cor 2:1-5](#); [2 Cor 10-13](#)).



Question
8

In what tangible ways was Jesus' resurrection influenced the way you walk as a believer?

What implications does this eyewitness testimony have for us today concerning the truthfulness of the gospel? While it offers proof for the resurrection as the best explanation for the empty tomb, it doesn't absolutely "prove" it. The resurrection still requires an element of faith. Yet, the proof it does offer gives us a much stronger platform on which to stand. It doesn't require such a giant leap of faith because it

dispels all the asinine modern theories concocted to dismiss the resurrection as illogical fantasy. For example, some “scholars” today try to dismiss Jesus’ appearances as mere psychological hallucinations. However, in doing so, they misinterpret crucial evidence, breaking modern secular principles and guidelines for psychological studies! So, let’s proceed from the “weakest” evidence to the “strongest” which will totally discredit this theory.

First, Scripture clearly notes that Jesus had a physical, bodily presence. Although He could do things impossible things from the perspective of physics and known principles in our world, such as appear in the middle of a locked room full of people ([John 20:19](#)) or disappear suddenly while talking to two people ([Luke 24:31](#)), He still did ordinary physical things like eat ([Luke 24:30, 43](#)) and He could be touched. Jesus still bore the scars of His crucifixion on His hands, feet, and side, but everything else had been healed. Those who doubted, like Thomas, could feel the imprint of the nails and sword ([John 20:24-27](#)). People could theoretically say that they interacted with a “hallucination” in such a way, but when they would awaken from their dream-like state they would have realized the interaction wasn’t real no matter how real it seemed at the time.

Second, the disciples were scared, saddened, and confused. They weren’t thinking about the “afterlife,” heaven, or the resurrection. They didn’t expect Jesus to rise from the dead even though He had told them He would. They were reflecting still on Jesus’ death! When the women found the tomb empty on the first



day of the week, the others did not believe them and had to see for themselves. They had no reason to “see” Him if indeed He hadn’t truly risen. Certainly, hallucinations happen unexpectedly, but generally they don’t happen to those who don’t have any reason to envision such things. For instance, Jesus didn’t appear just to His followers alone, but He appeared to those who had rejected Him and didn’t believe in him while He was alive—namely **James** and **Paul**. They had no reason to care or believe that

Instruct

Jesus had risen from the dead. But these appearances radically changed their lives and compelled them unequivocally to accept Christ as their Savior despite the persecution and death they would both eventually face.

Third, these appearances occurred over many days and in many places—including public venues. Yet, they stopped suddenly after forty days. If they were indeed hallucinations, why would they stop suddenly if they offered comfort and gave hope to people? It would only make sense that they continue indefinitely. Moreover, some of these appearances happened in public places which could have been witnessed by others. Strangely, however, no evidence exists to non-believers or other observers who reported Jesus' followers as acting peculiarly by talking to an imaginary person.

Fourth, hallucinations are generally person in nature. Only one person at a time has a hallucination and not a massive crowd. But Jesus' appearances were witnessed by many at the same time. Paul lists **500** witnesses **at once, the twelve, and all the apostles**. It doesn't make sense that rational, sane individuals would all see and observe the same thing at the same time. There would have been conflict reports and details. They would have all had radically different and personal visions even if they were on some type of hallucinogenic drug as some purport. People in drug-induced hallucinations, on any hallucination for that matter, would not have been able to give a coherent, orderly account in which all the parties involved could have agreed. They would have all seen something different!

Finally, the greatest evidence which offers solid proof for Jesus' resurrection is the empty tomb itself. People who hold that these appearances were mere hallucinations have overlooked the most obvious detail. They cannot dispute this detail in any way based on fact and they cannot deny that it destroys their whole case. If indeed Jesus' followers had hallucinated, the Jewish leaders and people of Jerusalem could have very easily



gone to the known tomb and produced His body. If it were a mere hallucination, the body would have still been in the tomb! The leaders would have every reason to prove the disciples as frauds. They tried to do so by even paying the guards to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body. Nonetheless, the leaders couldn't go to the tomb and produce the body because it wasn't there!

Question
9

What other theories have been proposed to explain the empty tomb? How can we use Scripture and historical evidence to discredit them?

1 Corinthians 15:9-11

THE PRODUCT OF SALVATION:

The gospel, when believed and applied, produces tangible or measurable transformation in our lives. Therefore, salvation through Christ not only saves us *from* something (death), but it saves us *to* something (walking righteously). Christ saves us from sin and unrighteousness which leads to wrath and destruction, but He saves us to a new life characterized by righteousness and obedience. Recall earlier how we established that eternal life is not the *primary* product of our salvation even though many people typically focus on it! If we have a biblical perspective, we ought to focus on how we live out our salvation right now in the way we walk.

For this reason, Paul acknowledges that he is **the least of the apostles who is not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God** (v. 9). Often, we wrongly view this as Paul being self-depreciative in this passage—expressing some type of false humility in describing

himself as **the least**. But this misses Paul's main point! The focus is not on his position as **least**, but rather the transformation God has produced within him according to His

FOR WE ARE GOD'S
WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN
CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD
WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED IN
ADVANCE AS OUR WAY OF LIFE.
- EPHESIANS 2:10

grace (v. 10; see also [1 Tim 1:15](#)). Paul went from persecuting the church to being persecuted for preaching Christ—an unbelievable transformation impossible without Christ. God did the work through Him. None of us is worthy of salvation because we all have sinned and rebelled against the Lord. Nevertheless, God has extended the call to salvation **by grace** to all who will believe and turn to Him.

Thus, Paul can now say **by the grace of God I am what I am** and **His grace toward me was not in vain**. There is evidence of that transformation. Paul has proof. He stands before them a changed man which others can visibly see. Yet, God, not Paul, brought about these changes. Paul can't take credit for them. Consequently, he must admit **not I, but by the grace of God which was with me**. Salvation is never based upon an "experience" or "feeling"; it's always based upon a single event with two parts: the crucifixion and resurrection. Still, we have evidence that we have "experienced" or accepted that event in a personal way in which we believe and behave. This event will impact us and leave a visible mark on our lives! Both we and others will see the transformative work of Christ within us.

Question
10

What other theories have been proposed to explain the empty tomb? How can we use Scripture and historical evidence to discredit them?

Paul ends this section with a declaration about the Corinthians' belief and acceptance of the gospel: **whether it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed** (v. 11). Their emphasis resides upon the Corinthians' belief. They had believed the gospel. But what had happened? They had strayed. They lost direction because they no longer applied the gospel in their walk. Paul, therefore, urges them to get back to fundamentals of their salvation by putting into practice the gospel in the way they walk in righteousness. In addition, Paul also underscores the call to preach the gospel—**whether it was I or they**. Although this is not an imperative or command, but a simple declarative statement about missionary activity, God elsewhere in Scripture has commanded us to proclaim the gospel and testify how He has transformed our lives **by grace**. Preaching or telling the gospel is not the responsibility of the pastoral staff alone. We must all take this call to disseminate the gospel seriously. We all have been commanded to tell the nations. Our job is to share and tell others, while it is God's job

to convict and change through the gospel.

Inspire

In *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, the movie opens in a tavern with a motley-looking group of men trying to figure out a riddle containing a key word that would decipher a diary giving the location of a resplendent treasure. The riddle read: “The debt that all men pay.” “Death,” one man surmised just as the room became engulfed in chaos. Every one of us has a sin debt because we have willfully rebelled against God. This debt is collected through our death. On our own, we can’t avoid it; we can’t overcome it; we can’t annul or cancel it. It will come to every one of us—whether old or young, rich or poor, or educated or uneducated. As generous as we may be, we can’t pay the debt of anyone else either since we all owe this debt ourselves. In order to satisfy this debt, we would need to be perfect; we couldn’t owe any kind of debt in the past no matter how little we may consider it to be.

Fortunately, there was One who came that owed no debts. He lived a perfect life fulfilling the requirements of the law. Jesus who made Himself flesh to dwell among us came to satisfy our debt completely. By dying for us on the cross, Jesus substituted His life for ours. He gave us His righteousness and took our sins upon Himself, dying in our place. Having promised this sacrifice long ago even before the foundation of the world, God offers us many benefits as joint heirs with Christ. Certainly, one of the benefits is an eternal life spent with Him. But an even greater gift is the new life we can now freely live through our transformed walk which displays His righteousness. As we celebrate the resurrection this Easter, may we remember the cost of this sacrifice whereby Jesus laid down His life to give us a new life characterized by righteousness conformed to His character.

Incorporate

How often do you share about this new sacrifice from an age-old promise with others?

Although we cannot definitively “prove” the resurrection which still requires an element of faith, what would you say to encourage someone who doubts it so that they might believe in Christ? Like Paul, what evidence can you cite?

What tangible or measurable effects should the resurrection have on our lives right now? What is the danger of solely focusing on the “eternal” life we have through Christ’s resurrection rather than these effects we should be able to see in our lives right now?

Journal: Document God's Work

April 27, 2025



A New Life

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

Focal Verse:

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Corinthians 15:20

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Introduce

Today, a stark contrast exists between the way we use the terms hope and assurance. According to our modern understanding, hope is a strong wish or desire for something good to happen or for a positive outcome to occur. At the same time, however, it still contains a hint of doubt or uncertainty. Thus, it indicates only the possibility that something may or may not happen—and it often reflects little more than just “wishful” thinking. For example, we may hear people say, “I hope we have good weather this weekend.” Or we ourselves may say, “I hope I can make it on time in all this traffic.” We may also even hear long-suffering sports fans wishfully say, “I hope the Cowboys win the Big Game this year!”

The term assurance, on the other hand, conveys the idea of confidence or certainty that something will happen as planned. In a sense, therefore, it communicates a guarantee that a promise will be fulfilled. Although less widely used than the word hope in our modern vocabulary, we may hear something like, “He gave me his assurance that we would make our destination on time.” Or we may hear something like, “The



bank provided me with written assurance of a guaranteed fixed rate for my home loan.” Perhaps, we hear the word hope used more often than assurance because very little in this life is guaranteed. Hope instills us with a certain optimism even though the outcome is technically far from assured.

To illustrate the difference between hope and assurance, consider the difference between flying standby and being a ticketed passenger. Those flying standby only have the possibility of getting a seat on a flight if all the conditions are met. In our understanding, they only have hope of making the flight if it has enough available seats or enough ticketed passengers fail to show up. They only have the hope that they are high enough on the boarding list to get ahead of all the other standby passengers waiting for the flight. Depending on the circumstances, however, it may take hours to catch a flight or they might not even find one at all. On the other hand, ticketholders

Introduce

have an absolute guarantee. According to our understanding, their ticket offers them the assurance that they can board the plane. They will have a seat no matter the circumstances or how crowded the plane may be.

Despite these marked differences between hope and assurance according to our modern vernacular, Scripture uses the terms almost synonymously. In the Bible, hope conveys the assurance or absolute certainty that God will fulfill what He has promised. With God, hope comes with a guarantee rather than a range of possibilities. When defining faith, Scripture confirms, “Now faith is the substance of the things hoped for, the evidence of the things not seen” (Heb 11:1). God hasn’t asked us to have “blind faith” so to speak, but instead He has provided us with all the evidence we need to have the confidence or assurance that we can trust Him.

In this sense, the resurrection of Christ gives us the “hope” or better the assurance that we can have new life through Him, being restored into fellowship with a holy and righteous God. Thus, the resurrection gives us the assurance just like those passengers who have a ticket to board the plane versus the ones trying to fly standby. Through His death, Christ purchased the “ticket” for us and offers it to us at no charge if only we would accept it by repenting of our sins! Yet, many people still foolishly try to obtain this new life by flying standby—impossibly meeting all the conditions on their own. They “hope” they can obtain this life through good works or by following certain religious practices. However, we don’t have to “hope”; we can know “for sure” that we have this life (1 John 5:11-13). When we place our confidence in what Christ has done for us instead of what we can do ourselves and surrender our lives into His control, His resurrection guarantees that we will share in this new life with Him!

Key
Question

On what things here on earth do you tend to place the most confidence or view with the most assurance? How does that compare to your confidence in Christ?

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

THE FUTILITY OF LIFE WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION:

Two weeks ago, we examined the overwhelming evidence that Paul presented in support of Jesus' bodily resurrection as a counter to the Corinthians' doubts and false claims that Jesus did not actually rise from the dead. In general, he appealed to two main strands of evidence: 1) the prophetic promises found in Scripture (1 Cor 15:3-4) and 2) the eyewitness testimony from those to whom the resurrected Jesus had appeared firsthand (1 Cor 15:5-8). As a result, Paul essentially challenged the core of their belief by asking them on what leg they have to stand since both the eyewitness testimony along with the empty tomb itself provided solid affirmation that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. So, to begin this new section, the Apostle rhetorically asks, "If Christ is preached [by eyewitnesses] **that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead**" (v. 12)? As such, they have no legal basis for their claims! All the evidence stood stacked against them: prophecy in Scripture, eyewitness testimony, and the physical evidence in the tomb lacking the presence of a physical body.

For the sake of analysis, Paul now assumes that their position is true in order to demonstrate their flawed reasoning and thereby disprove their argument. Thus, he



uses a technique in debate logic called *reductio ad absurdum* whereby he traces his opponent's position to its logical conclusion, pushing it to its limits of absurdity to show its impracticality and error. He begins with a simple, yet powerful statement: **But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen** (v. 13). Therefore, if the Corinthians assert that no one rises from the dead bodily, then the logical conclusion must follow that Christ has not risen either. Over the next few verses, Paul continues this line of reasoning, highlighting the numerous contradictions and consequences that arise from the Corinthians' errant position.

In fact, if the Corinthians' position were true, the entire foundation of Christianity would crumble! So, Paul explains that **if Christ is not risen, then their preaching is**

empty and the Corinthians' faith is also empty (v. 14). While the NKJV retains the literal translation of the Greek word empty in this case, many of the other translations interpret it as "in vain" (KJV, RSV, NASB, CSB), "useless" (NIV, NLT), or "futile" (NET). While all these translations do capture Paul's meaning to some extent, it seems best to view "empty" in this context as equivalent to the expression "having no basis" or "foundation." Without the resurrection of Christ at its center, Christianity is indeed worthless, useless, or futile; but according to the logical legal argument Paul is making, it has no basis or foundation on which to stand! In other words, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is no different than any other world religion.

Without the resurrection, everything these early missionaries preached and the early church practiced (i.e., their **faith**) had no basis or substance. In reality, they fared no better than the pagan religions from which they had come whereby they had served non-existent gods. For Paul, **preaching** meant both the content of the gospel message as well as the act of declaring it. Apart from the resurrection, the gospel has no meaning because it can't remove sin nor can it deliver the promise of new life. Thus, if one held the Corinthians' erroneous belief about resurrection, then the gospel would become like any other human philosophy designed to give mankind some hope in the midst of a dysfunctional world that would end only in death. Literally, the gospel would be nothing more than an **empty** promise because it could never lead to life!

To illustrate the emptiness of the gospel apart from the resurrection, consider how many companies try to entice people to buy their products by offering a guarantee. They often stamp these promises prominently on the side of the packaging in big, bold lettering. Yet, the guarantee is only as trustworthy as the company who stands behind it. Many companies talk a "big game," but when it comes time to deliver on their promises, they look for any excuse not to do so. They may even try placing the blame on the consumer for not properly registering their product or even accusing them of misusing it and breaking the terms of service. They may also bury hundreds of conditions in the fine print of the warranty that serve as loopholes to void the guarantee. Hence, the guarantee becomes meaningless. What looked like an advantageous promise turns out to be nothing more than **empty** words



because it has no substance standing behind it from the company! Apart from the resurrection, Paul contends that the gospel functions much the same way as a hollow promise. Without the resurrection as a guarantee from God concerning the fulfillment of His promise, it does not have the power to save, give life, or transform.

Question
1

What are some of the empty promises that world religions make?

Paul continues his logical analysis by pointing out the serious implications of their errant belief about a “spiritual” resurrection rather than a literal, bodily one: If they as the first missionaries had made claims about the promises of God based on the resurrection of Christ when He hadn’t really risen and the early church had believed them, then they are nothing more than fraudsters and liars. If the Corinthians’ assumption that **the dead do not rise** is true, then the apostles and all who had preached the gospel **are false witnesses of God because** they had **testified of God that He raised Christ** when He actually hadn’t (v. 15). To further clarify and emphasize the contradiction in their reasoning, Paul restates the central flaw in their logic: **If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen** (v. 16).

What does Paul mean by **false witnesses of God**? Linguistically, we can interpret this statement in one of two ways. First, the apostles or those preaching the gospel bear **false witness about** God in claiming that He has done something which in fact He did not really do. If the Corinthians’ position about there being only a spiritual resurrection for believers were true, Paul and his missionary cohorts had intentionally deceived them by advocating that God had raised Jesus from the dead bodily when He really didn’t! If Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead leaving an empty tomb as explicit evidence, then this makes Paul and those preaching the gospel nothing more than liars. They have completely misrepresented God and distorted what He had said for their own personal benefit. For this reason, most modern translations attempt to reduce any ambiguity by rendering the phrase: **we are found false witnesses about God because we have testified about God that He raised up Christ** when in fact He hadn’t done so. In the context, this

that by two immutable things, in which
it is impossible for God to lie, we might
have strong consolation, who have fled
for refuge to lay hold of the hope set
before us.

Hebrews 6:18

interpretation seems most likely.

Furthermore, this would also make Jesus Himself a liar by implication. On numerous occasions, Jesus promised that He would rise from the dead bodily. After confronting the corrupt moneychangers who exploited worshipers in the temple, for example, Jesus challenged the religious leaders in Jerusalem saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19; see also Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). To clarify for his audience, John immediately notes that Jesus “was speaking of the temple of His body” (John 2:21). If Jesus did not rise from the dead bodily, then this would also make Him a liar because He had claimed to do something which He couldn’t really do! Moreover, Jesus’ religious and political enemies among the Jews clearly understood that He spoke about a literal, bodily resurrection. After His crucifixion, they feared that His disciples would attempt to steal the body to claim that He indeed had risen, so they approached Pilate with a request to guard the tomb with a detachment of soldiers (Matt 27:62-66). If Jesus’ enemies rightly understood the physical, bodily nature of the resurrection, why couldn’t the Corinthians?

Question # 2

What false claims do other religions or cults make about God or Jesus today?

Second, the phrase could also refer to bearing false witness in God’s name although this is somewhat less likely based on the context. Nevertheless, it has some implications for our understanding of this passage. The Old Testament strongly condemns false prophets who prophesy something in the name of the Lord that doesn’t come true. It even specifies death by stoning as the penalty for speaking wrongly in God’s name (Deut 13:5). The New Testament also instructs us to “test every spirit” because not all spirits come from the Lord and many promote false prophecies, particularly that Jesus did not come in the flesh but only came in the spirit (1 John 4:1-3). Today, we might hear something like this, “God showed or revealed this to me” or “gave me special insight,” but what the person then says contradicts the known evidence that God has clearly demonstrated in Scripture. Therefore, we must exercise great caution about what we consume and believe. It must be consistent with what God has actually said in His Word as well as known historical evidence that corroborates the Bible.

Question
#3

In what instances have you heard someone claim something about God, about what He has done, or about what He has “spoken” to them that you knew not to be true? How did you respond or confront the person?

Paul continues systematically dismantling the Corinthians’ faulty logic by highlighting another dangerous consequence of their denial of the resurrection. This time he reasons that **if Christ is not risen**, then their **faith is futile** or worthless because they remain **in** their **sins** without any hope of salvation (v. 17). While this statement echoes verse 14, it also introduces a critical distinction through a deliberate choice of words. In verse 14, for instance, the Greek word, translated “**empty**” by the NKJV, communicates the idea of something lacking basis or substance—in other words a baseless claim. Many modern translations, however, render the term “useless” or “futile,” but this can blur the distinction with verse 17 since Paul actually uses two different words. Here, in verse 17, the Greek actually conveys the idea of worthlessness or ineffectiveness. It goes beyond merely lacking a basis; it means to be completely ineffective, unproductive, or incapable of achieving its stated outcome.

Apart from both the death and resurrection of Christ, the gospel has no power to save. It’s worthless and ineffective. It becomes only a good novel or an interesting collection of stories just like any other modern work of fiction that we may read for entertainment or inspiration. Without the resurrection, both salvation and reconciliation with the Lord are impossible. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then Christianity becomes just another empty human philosophy or moral message with good intention, but it has no power

whatsoever to save or transform. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, moreover, He becomes a discredited fraud, His apostles and followers bear **false witness**, and the entire Christian faith collapses with nothing on which to stand. It would simply follow the same course as the myriad of other human religions where mankind attempts to reach God by what we can do on our own.



To help us grasp the worthlessness of the gospel apart from the resurrection, consider counterfeit money for a moment. No matter how convincing it may look, it has no real value. We cannot use it to purchase anything. Although it may fool some with an undiscerning eye, it remains worthless when we ultimately put to the test. For a time, it may deceive others to place their trust in it, but once exposed as fake its lack of legitimacy becomes apparent! Some might collect counterfeit bills for their artistry—especially if produced by a notorious forger—but they can never be spent as legal tender. As a counterfeit bill, it can never fulfill its purpose of functioning as true, legal currency! The gospel apart from Jesus' death and resurrection functions in much the same way as counterfeit money. It can never fulfill God's intended purpose of purchasing or redeeming us from our sin and graciously granting us eternal life. Like counterfeit currency, a gospel without the resurrection may fool people for a while, offering a false sense of hope. But in the end, especially at the time of death, it will be exposed for what it truly is: powerless, ineffective, and utterly worthless. It has no power to save us!

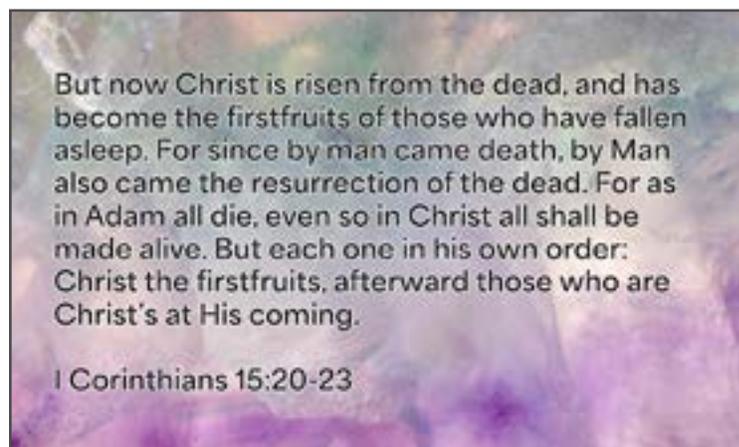
Question
4

What tests should we use when evaluating other religions or beliefs to see if they are counterfeit? At the same time, what evidence from Christianity would you use to point to its legitimacy?

If Christ did not rise from the dead, Paul argues that **those who have fallen asleep** (i.e., died) **in Christ have perished** according to the Corinthians' logic (v. 18). In this case, to perish doesn't just entail death into eternal nothingness or unconsciousness; it implies something far worse. Without the resurrection, those **in Christ** have died in their **sins** and now face eternal condemnation in Hell as the just penalty for their iniquity, for they had no one to save them! By denying the resurrection, as some in Corinth had done, they essentially stripped the gospel of its power and promise. Without Christ's bodily resurrection, there is no hope—either in this life or the next. We have no way of living a transformed life consistent with God's holy character and we remain unforgiven, unreconciled, and eternally lost.

For this reason, Paul concludes that **if we only have hope in Christ in this life** apart from the guarantee of the resurrection, then **we are of all men the most pitiable** (v. 19). If the resurrection is a lie, then Christians are to be pitied above **all** people. We

have built our lives on a false hope. We have hedged our bets on something and someone who cannot deliver us. Without the resurrection, the Christian life isn't merely difficult; it's impossible. We have become gullible victims of a grand hoax, robbed of any potential to enjoy life right now or in the future (see 1 Cor 15:30-32). But thanks be to God that He has offered us proof that substantiates the resurrection so that we can have hope and assurance of life right now and eternally!



1 Corinthians 15:20-23

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION FOR US:

Although in the previous verses Paul temporarily assumed the Corinthians' position about the resurrection was true in order to show their logical error, he now explains what actually happened that Sunday morning at the tomb and what implications it has for us. He begins with the adversative conjunction **but now** to highlight the drastic difference between the Corinthians' position and the truth. Therefore, Paul emphatically and triumphantly declares, "**But now Christ is risen from the dead**" (v. 20). Because of His physical, bodily resurrection from the tomb, Jesus **has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. Consequently, Christ's resurrection gives us the confidence and assurance that life awaits us after death and not mere destruction as some of the Corinthians had supposed.



As the first Person whom God raised from the dead never to die again, Jesus' resurrection sets the precedent for us as His followers. When God brings this current era of human history to a close and fully eliminates sin in the new heaven and earth, He will also raise us from the dead physically and give us incorruptible bodies like Christ so we can dwell with Him forever (1 Cor 15:42-44). Therefore, Paul uses the term **firstfruits**

Instruct

to convey the idea of a downpayment or guarantee (see also 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:4). In the Old Testament, Israel set aside the **firstfruits** or the initial and best portion of their harvest in recognition of God delivering them from enslavement in Egypt as well as for providing them with a bountiful promised land flowing with milk and honey (Lev 23:9-14; Deut 26:1-11).

Setting aside these **firstfruits** not only honored God for what He had already done for them, but it also expressed trust and confidence that He would continue graciously providing for them in the future. Likewise, the **firstfruits** of the resurrection also recognizes what God has already done in delivering us from enslavement to sin, but it also looks forward with assurance to His gracious provision of an eternal life spent with Him. Thus, the fact that Jesus rose bodily from the grave serves as a guarantee that everyone who has a relationship with Him will also share in this same type of resurrection!

Question
5

In what way should our participation in Jesus' resurrection affect the way we live right now?

Next, Paul explains the significance of the resurrection in terms of its relationship to our salvation by giving a broad snapshot of the gospel from the rebellion of man to the redemption offered by the Savior. Hence, he notes that sin entered the world through the willful disobedience of one **man**—Adam—who ate of the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17, 3:6-19). As a result, **death** also entered the world through this same **man** (v. 21). Because we **all** share in Adam's humanity, we will **all die** just like him (v. 22). However, we will **die** not just because Adam sinned and we will vicariously suffer his same fate; rather, we **all die** because we have chosen to follow in his footsteps and have intentionally sinned and rebelled against God our Creator. Each one of us perpetuates sin and death in the world through our own participation in it.

But just as **death** came into the world through the disobedience of one **man**, life has also come into the world through the obedience of one **Man**—Christ (v. 21). Christ's obedience, however, meant **death** for Him—even **death** on the cross (Phil 2:6-8). Thus, Paul can confidently declare that **in Christ all shall be made alive** (v. 22). While we all share in Adam's **death** by joining him in sin, God has invited us to have life

in Christ by turning from our sins and surrendering to Him. Paul concludes this section by summarizing the progression of God’s redemptive plan for salvation, stating that “**each in his own order**” must come (v. 23). In other words, for salvation to be effective it must happen in a certain sequence: first, the death and resurrection of Christ and then second, the resurrection of those who belong to Him at **His second coming**. For us to have life, Christ first had to pave the way. He had to pay the penalty of our sin through His **death**, but then He also had to rise bodily from the grave as a guarantee of future life for those who trust and serve Him right now.

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:19

Thus, Paul explains that **Christ is the firstfruits of those who** have a relationship with Him or belong to Him **at His second coming**.

Although we yet await our future bodily resurrection, Jesus’ resurrection already has tangible effects on our lives right now—chief among them is the unparalleled security it offers. Nothing in this world can offer a guarantee like this. Eventually, everything in which we place our hope—no matter how reliable it may seem—will fail. For example, we trust banks to safeguard our hard-earned money. When we write checks or go to withdraw cash, we expect our money to be there. Generally, with federal regulations, protections, and insurance (FDIC), it gives us peace of mind so that we rarely give its security a second thought. But during the Great Depression, many banks failed and they still fail today!

Many people place their most treasured items—rare valuables, family heirlooms, and important documents—in safe-deposit boxes, assured that the bank will keep them secure. But this confidence can sometimes be misplaced. For instance, Philip Poniz learned an expensive lesson about his bank’s failure to guarantee the security of the contents in their safe-deposit boxes even when his loss was their own fault.* Having immigrated from Poland to the US, Poniz had amassed an



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extensive collection of watches—obtaining some of the rarest and most expensive in the world. As his collection grew and he became internationally recognized as the foremost expert in the field, he realized the need to store it in a more secure location than his house, so he rented several safe-deposit boxes at his local bank branch.

On April 7, 2014, however, he discovered all the contents of one of his boxes had disappeared. After investigating, he found that the bank had mistakenly confiscated the items in his box which they had confused with another customer's box who was delinquent in rent. Even though the bank erred and had sent its contents to holding facility in North Carolina, Poniz could not legally recover much of the ten million dollars he lost. With the incident, he learned that "there are no federal laws governing the boxes; no rules require banks to compensate customers if their property or stolen." In this case, even though it was clearly the bank's negligence, Poniz realized that "customers rarely recover more than a small fraction of what they've lost—if they recover anything at all."* Despite his illusion about the bank's trustworthiness, his valuable collection in reality had no guaranteed security at all!

In Reference



See Stacy Cowley, "Deposit Boxes Fall through the Cracks," *The Columbus Dispatch* (Aug 11, 2019).

Unlike these safe-deposit boxes, Jesus' resurrection offers us a true and lasting peace of mind. Through God's raising of Jesus from the dead, we can see a concrete fulfillment of His promises. Christ is the living, breathing, and walking guarantee that God will also give life to those who trust in Him. Because of Jesus's resurrection, we can be confident that God will keep His word to us. Therefore, this firm security in Christ also reduces our anxiety. We don't have to worry about anything since we already know the final outcome! Regardless of the circumstances we may face here on earth, we can confidently know that God has already won the victory over sin and death. Therefore, we can look beyond our current circumstances to see our future lives spent with God.

As a result, this assurance in the Lord should empower us to be bold in our walk. We don't have to fear what others may say or do to use because our security is rooted in Christ and not the principles of this world. Therefore, Christ gives us the boldness and confidence to live righteously in an unrighteous world according to God's call on our lives. Consequently, we should never compromise our walk. We must continually seek

to conform our character to Christ instead of seeking companionship by identifying with the world (Jas 4:4). In contrast to the world who has no hope apart from Christ, we can find comfort in the midst of trials and tribulations. We can even face death with a certain optimism and joy. While we may sorrow or grieve in the moment of temporary separation, we don't grieve as those without hope nor do we need to fear death as something to avoid (1 Thess 4:13). We can embrace our circumstances and serve the Lord with confidence, knowing that He has a place prepared for us to reside with Him in heaven forever.

Question
#6

In what ways has Christ's resurrection given you the boldness to live out your faith?

1 Corinthians 15:24-28

THE FINALITY OF HUMAN GOVERNANCE:

Continuing his chronological synopsis of the events of the gospel, Paul now addresses what will happen when **the end** of this age **comes** (v. 24). The death and resurrection of Christ mentioned in verses 20 to 23 prepare us for this time. Death comes to all—whether or not they believe in the resurrection of Christ. But only life awaits those who have turned from their sins and trusted in Christ. Therefore, the decision God asks us to make about His Son right now on earth will determine where we spend eternity: Do we reject Christ and face a second, eternal death or do we accept Him and participate in the life that He offers through His resurrection (John 3:16; Rev 20:14)? Whether upon our death or at the conclusion of this age, our decision becomes final at that point; we no longer have any more chances to respond to the gospel and repent. Judgment has come (Heb 9:27). Although one day all people everywhere will acknowledge Christ as Lord, God will judge them based on the time He gave them to turn to His Son and follow Him now in this era (Phil 2:9-11; John 5:21-30)!

If Jesus' resurrection guarantees eternal life for those who follow Him, Paul must now explain why those who have a relationship with Him still die physically.

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

John 5:28-29

Instruct

God has a multi-faceted plan to defeat sin and death permanently, but for now both still reign in this world while Christ completes His redemptive work amongst mankind by offering salvation to those who will repent. Because of His grace, God has patiently given mankind the chance to respond to the gospel receiving life in place of death when they trust in Christ. Like the gestation period for a plant or even a pregnancy, God gives the gospel time to develop fully and complete its work of salvation so that all people might come to the knowledge of repentance and all might be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4). Once the gospel has fully achieved His intended purpose, God will send His Son again to bring this era of history to a close (Matt 24:36-44). Therefore, Jesus' resurrection has set this plan in motion which will culminate in a final series of events that will bring the current era of human governance to a close and usher in a new era free from sin and death.

With this theological background in mind, we can examine the specific details of Jesus' return and the end of the age that Paul outlines in this passage. When God sends His Son the second time to conclude this era and opportunity for salvation, Christ will deliver or hand over the kingdom to God the Father and He (Christ) will put an end to all rule and all authority and power (v. 24). Not only will Christ bring a conclusion to this era of human governance, but He will also end the spiritual hold that the demonic forces have over this world, namely through sin and death (Eph 6:10-18; Col 2:15). Nothing can stand in God's way of accomplishing His purposes. Through Christ, God will defeat all that stand in opposition to Him. For this reason, Paul explains that Christ (He) must reign until He (God) has put all enemies under His (Christ's) feet (v. 25).

In-Depth Information



Throughout this passage, the referent of the third person pronouns (He, His, or Him) is somewhat difficult to ascertain. By working back from the clear references in verse 28, we can loosely determine whether the third person pronoun refers to God the Father or God the Son (Christ). So, as an aid, I have supplied the referent in parentheses.

But, as we have already established, God has allowed sin and **death** to continue momentarily so that the world might have time to repent and be saved. We can be completely reassured that Christ has already defeated **death** through His resurrection

in accordance with God's plan to give us a chance to respond to the gospel. This is why Paul can say that **death is the last enemy** is in the process of being **destroyed** (v. 26). Even though God has briefly delayed the inevitable (**death**) for our sakes, it's as good as done because the crucifixion and resurrection have already sealed its fate. Like a game clock in sports, time is quickly ticking away; the days of this era are numbered. One day, God will announce with finality, "Game over," and our judgment will commence.

To reinforce his point, Paul appeals to Psalm 8:6: "**For He (God) has put all things under His (Christ's) feet**" (v. 27).

He further qualifies this quotation by noting that **when He (God) says "all things are put under Him (Christ), it**

is evident that He (God) who put all things under Him (Christ) is excepted. Paul continues to assert that **when all things are made subject to Him (Christ), then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him (God) who put all things under Him (Christ) so that God may be all in all** (v. 28). Before we can address the relationship between the Father and Son in this passage, we must first understand the general point Paul wants to make. From the beginning, God had a plan to restore sinful mankind through Christ. Only Jesus' death and resurrection could defeat sin and death permanently so that God could redeem the entire world. One day, therefore, God will complete this plan to restore the universe to its perfect, sinless, state (i.e., **all in all**). But this also means that some, those individuals who have rejected Him, will face eternal condemnation and destruction along with death while those who have a relationship with the Son will receive eternal life.

Perhaps, however, the bigger theological issue in this passage is how Christ can **be subject to God the Father**. This declaration in no way implies that they are not co-equal. Despite being equal in every way (John 10:30), they do have distinct roles that they each must fulfill as a member of the Trinity. Within these roles, they often defer to one another—in what we could call functional submission—in order to ensure that their overarching plan succeeds. We could compare this somewhat to marriage where two people have become one flesh. While the husband and wife are equal in terms of person, status, and value in the marriage, God has tasked them with specific roles.



Instruct

To have a functional marriage relationship, both the husband and the wife need to defer to one another at times depending upon what role or function is required. One submitting to the other doesn't make them any less equal in the partnership! In a way, God **the Son** and God **the Father** provide an example of what we ought to be and how we ought to view our various roles whether in marriage or in the church.

The night before His crucifixion as He prayed, Jesus laid aside His own personal will in His humanity and said, "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Through this act, we see the same type of functional submission on display as here in 1 Corinthians 15. It also beautifully captures the different roles they had as members of the Godhead. God the Father designed and orchestrated the plan, ensuring it came to fruition by exercising His sovereignty in putting all things under Jesus' feet (see also John 6:38-39). Jesus, on the other hand, executed the plan literally through His death and resurrection. God designed it and Jesus was the agent who accomplished it! Through these actions, we have an assurance of new life; we don't have to guess or "hope," but we can have the confidence that when we play our trust in Christ and repent of our sins that we will have this life.

Last week, we celebrated Jesus' triumphant resurrection from the grave. For a week, that probably became our sole focus. We may have greatly anticipated time with friends and family to celebrate. We may have looked forward to the different activities we had as a church. We may have even meticulously planned what we would wear to service. But, then as the days pass, it began to lose its significance as we returned to our routines. It had less of an impact because it no longer became our sole focus. However, the resurrection isn't something we should celebrate once a year as a memorial. It should be something that impacts our lives every day. The resurrection is not primarily about the life we will receive one day when we get to heaven, but about the life we can live right now in Christ as we await His return. How has Jesus' guarantee of this new life through His resurrection impacted you? Do you share the gospel with others daily? Has it transformed your thoughts, your words, your attitudes, and your actions? Has it compelled you to use your giftedness to serve God daily—not just when we gather as a church? In the coming weeks and months, may we not just contemplate the value of the resurrection on our lives, but may we live it out!

Incorporate

How has the resurrection impacted your daily life as you await the complete fulfillment of God's promise?

How should Jesus' obedience and submission to the Father inspire us to serve? To what tangible or visible ways can you point to that kind of submission in your own life? Are there any areas in which you have not fully submitted?

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