

How do we know? Indeed, we only know and have assurance if Christ has been raised, and if Christ has been raised, then we too will be raised. The importance of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 for the church of Jesus Christ is beyond calculation. It is important to the church of Jesus Christ not because it serves as the argument principally for the historicity of the resurrection, for that was not Paul's particular or expressed idea when he penned these words. While these words that Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 15 are certainly helpful in giving a defense of the historicity of the resurrection itself, he first wrote it to a group of Christians. And as Pastor Flora pointed out last week that it was and is a part of the whole gospel that was laid out by Paul, that he had received when he says, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This is for Paul the foundation. But his reasons for having it here and to this church was because they were denying--at least a good portion of them--they were denying the bodily resurrection of believers at the coming of Christ, and this he believed would shipwreck their faith. Even worse, it would end up in places that they perhaps had fully not considered. And so he lays out for them in verses 12 through 34 the first portion of his argument.

Now last week Pastor Flora took us through verse 7, and rightly so, and as he and I talked about it this past week he recognized if he got into 8 through 11, it would be really long. Well, he was right. My sermon in the first service was really long. So what we're going to do is, we're going to do something a little different than what I did in the first service. And that is, I'm not going to read through the text and then go back through and read through it again as I preach through it. What I would like to do this morning is to read through each portion, 8 through 11, let's deal with that portion. And then we're going to look at the following segments together as you see it in your outline. You'll notice the verses that correspond to each one of the points.

My hope is, my prayer is, that the church of Jesus Christ--and here I particularly want to appeal to those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior--that this is foundational for your life and our life together. That this is the reason for which we even talk about what it means to follow Jesus Christ. For without the bodily resurrection of believers through Jesus Christ coming again, then our ethics are futile. And all we have is between cradle to grave and nothing else. So let's look together at this great passage. And before we do, let me pray. Father, I thank you for all those here this morning who profess faith. And I pray, Father, for those who are investigating Christianity and who perhaps don't know the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you would usher all of us in to the great truths, power, foundation of the bodily resurrection of believers in Jesus Christ, because Christ has been raised and by that we have assurance. We pray you would help us. In Jesus' name, amen.

So together let's look at verses 8 through 11. You'll see on the screen before you. "Last of all he appeared to me, also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all men--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

Paul is declaring for them, before he goes into this great argument on the foundational nature of the resurrection, that he is an apostle with a heart set free. His heart is set free before this group of people because the first thing he ran up against was that this group of people denied the validity of his apostleship. This goes all the way back to the beginning of this letter. They did not like how Paul understood what it meant to be living the life in the spirit, because Paul over and over again talked about his weakness. They didn't like the idea of Christian faith being spirit-filled and weakness all going together. But for Paul, he saw this as intricately connected. That to be a Christian, that to be

spirit-filled, is the recognition that we live not from strength to strength, but in our weakness Christ's power is made perfect. So he is an apostle with a heart set free because he's able to look at this group of people who deny and even question his apostleship, and he can say to them, I am an apostle who was abnormally born. Meaning I'm a freak of the apostle nature. I don't deserve to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church. But I have been set free from your judgment, from your abuse of me. Why? Well, he tells us in verse 9. He says, "For I am the least of all the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He glories in his weakness. Why? Verse 10: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." A heart that is set free is a heart that is founded on grace. He has nothing to hide. He is simply saying, this is who I was, this is what Christ has done. He's brought me to himself, and he has said I am to be an apostle to the Jews and to the Gentiles, and I preach Christ. And this letter was written before Romans was, so you can see--as we read earlier this morning from the book of Romans--you can see the progression of his theology. The theology of Christ saving us while we were yet his enemies, dead in our sins and trespasses, only comes from a heart that recognizes that he has life because of grace. And he says because of grace, I am who I am. I cannot hide from it. But then he says, and God's grace was not to me without effect. From a persecutor to a church planter, from one who persecuted to one who is now being persecuted for Christ sake. He is a heart set free.

But there is one more aspect of this heart being set free. When he says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all men--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believe." Paul says in that verse, verse 11, what he actually has been saying since the beginning of the letter. In chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians he says this to them, as they have been pummeling him with accusations of being of this weak apostle, not very good at speaking, not very eloquent. He says to them these words: "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me." He is saying, because I am apostle in weakness, saved by grace, enabled by grace, empowered by grace, changed by grace, then it doesn't matter what you think of me, Corinthians. It doesn't even matter what I think of myself. It only matters what the Lord thinks and says of me. And he can so easily say to them, this is what we preach, whether it is me or someone else. This is what we have said, and this is what you have believed. And so he removes the oxygen from the fire that somehow he's a weak apostle. And so, as it were, in his weakness, he sets forth the argument about the resurrection and the importance of the belief in the bodily resurrection of the Christian, because Christ was physically resurrected from the dead. And he sets it out for them, because it is to define their whole life together. So let's look at that together, then, with, as an apostle with a heart set free--in the words of New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce--let's move forward.

He then tells us there are consequences of denying the resurrection, The consequences of denying the resurrection. And in verses 12 to 19, he lays these out for us. If you have your pen and paper, I want you, if you will, to follow along and jot these notes in between those outline points. Simply verse 12 and following. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

So what is he saying are the consequences of denying the bodily resurrection of those who believe in Jesus Christ? Here they are. Number one, and I warn you, they're meant to be devastating. One, we worship a dead man. Verse 13 tells us that if the Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are

not raised from death to new life, with new physical bodies, and made new in the glory of Christ, then Jesus was not raised. Therefore, we worship a dead man. And what that means is, then all we do--we simply gather together on Sunday with great pageantry with churches all over the world and simply worship dust and dirt and the memory of a spiritual guru who was nothing other than a martyr. That's it.

Consequence number two. He tells us in verse 14a, that if believers are not raised, therefore Christ is not raised, and if that's the case then our preaching is with empty words. What that means is that the only words that a preacher can give, the only value that the Bible then is for those who then follow it and hold to these other truths that somehow the bodies are not raised, and therefore not Christ--then all the Bible is, and all the preachers are doing, is inspiring. Inspiration is simply a sugar high without any nutrients. A message that is preached that cannot find its foundation in a promise, in assurance, is completely and utterly destitute and vacant of value. We worship a dead man, and then we would preach empty words, but it gets worse.

The third consequence of denying the bodily resurrection of believers is a powerless faith. Verse 14b, when he says, "our preaching is useless and so is your faith." A powerless faith simply means that those of you here who profess faith, then--your faith is nothing but futility. It has no basis. It has no worth. And it is completely and utterly ineffectual. It then becomes what Paul says about the last days, that they will have--there will be people and generations that will have a form of spirituality but deny its power, and for Paul that power is something beyond human inspiration. The power is--faith that does not change who we are, faith that is not based in a real historical event of what God has been doing and will ultimately bring to an end and form in all of his glory--then that is a faith that is futile. It is a powerless faith.

Number four. Fourth consequence to denying the bodily resurrection of believers at their death and in Christ's return is that that makes the church false witnesses. Now let me explain how important it is to remember this reality. That means that everything that I'm saying, everything that the Bible's saying, everything that this church stands for, every part of Christ's body throughout the world, are nothing other than purveyors of deception. Therefore, we are misleading. We are erroneous. We are counterfeit. And I would say, worse of all, we are treacherous. Because we are giving people the idea that there is hope here, when in fact if all we have is this life, then what hope are we offering? What value? We simply are just another cult.

But I think it leads to his ultimate fifth consequence, which he gives us in verses 17 to 19, and it is this: It leaves us hopeless. When he says in verses 17 to 19, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. And if only in this life we have hope..." so he's saying, if all we have in terms of hope is in this life, then we are to be pitied. Paul is saying if bodies are not raised at Christ's return, therefore he was not raised, and if those two things are not true, then we are without hope. And that means this. First, we have no solution. We have no antidote to human beings' greatest problem, sin. All the words that we read earlier from Romans 5, that while we were yet his enemies, Christ died for us, reconciling us to God--all of that is nothing but a blathering on about justification and imputation if Christ was not raised and if believers who are in Christ will not be raised in new bodies. We will have no solution for sin before a holy God. We are at a dead end. Secondly, it is hopeless because he tells us that those who have fallen asleep, those who died who were saints, former saints, are nothing better than just former. That there is no great cloud of witnesses. There is no tradition of people to look back on--all those biographies about Christians believing what they believe, dying at the stake for the validity and authority of Scripture. It's all worthless.

But it is hopeless not just because we are dead in our sins and because former saints are just former, it is this: Then that means we are nothing but just finite, hopeless people. And all we need to do is try

to find as much pleasure out of life as possible. What I want you to see is where Paul was in this argument, and he means to leave us, if you will, at a very dark place, because he believes that's exactly where a denial of the bodily resurrection of Christians at Christ's return and Jesus' non-bodily resurrection, then, where it leaves us. What he was writing here in the earliest parts of the Christian church would then be voiced by a much more contemporary author who did not believe, and his name was Leo Tolstoy. I had to read him in college, but didn't appreciate him like I do now. This is what he wrote near his 54th birthday, reflecting on his 50th. He said this: "All these things had been happening to me at the time, and I was surrounded by on all sides by what I considered to be complete happiness. I was not yet fifty, I had a kind and loving and beloved wife, loving children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding with no effort on my part. I was respected by relatives and friends far more than ever before. I was praised by strangers and could consider myself a celebrity without deceiving myself. Moreover, I was not unhealthy in mind or body, only in the contrary. In all these circumstances I found myself at a point where I could no longer go on living, and since I feared death I had to deceive myself in order to refrain my taking my own life. This spiritual condition presented itself to me in the following manner. My life is some kind of stupid and evil joke that someone is playing on me. But whether or not this someone who is playing a joke, is laughing at me, really existed did not make it any easier for me. I could not attribute any rational meaning to a single act of my life, let alone could I have any trust in any of my accomplishments. It had all been common knowledge for such a long time: today or tomorrow sickness and death will come--and they already had to those dear to me and to myself--and nothing will remain other than the stench and the worms. Sooner or later my deeds, whatever they may have been, will be forgotten and will no longer exist. What is all the fuss about, then? How can any person carry on living and fail to perceive this? What is astonishing is that it is only possible to go on living while you are intoxicated with life. Once sober it is impossible not to see that it is all a mere trick, and a stupid trick at that." He had no living hope, and he took that logic to its logical end. If all we have is between the cradle and grave, and nothing else, then what do we have?

Paul says, do you see? And if Paul and if Leo Tolstoy can agree, I think we need to listen. Tolstoy had nothing to offer us. Paul does. And in verses 20 through 28 he gives it to us. The resurrection as a foundation. This foundation is, Paul means to tell us, that there is a logic for why the Christian life has its basis in the belief of the bodily resurrection of those who believe when Christ returns, because Christ was raised. And here is what he does. He gives us four quick points. Quickly. Houston, we've had a problem. That's his first solution. If you look at verses 20 to 28, here's what he says: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that it does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." The resurrection is foundation, because first, "Houston, we've had a problem" and here's the problem. This is the first time Paul ever uses a direct understanding in the linking of Adam and Christ. He says, Adam, who sinned and rebelled against God fell to death. The sting of death is sin, so therefore, Adam, who is our natural head of the human race--what was in Adam now is in all of us. He then says these great words, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." So if Adam, who is the head of the human race, fell into sin, rebelled against God, therefore suffered unto death, therefore Christ, like Adam, becomes a new head of a new humanity. Unlike Adam, Christ came as a man but was without sin and obeyed the Father in every way. So Christ, then, like Adam, as a head of a new humanity, that therefore for all those who believe in Christ by faith are therefore in Christ, so if Christ

has been raised from the dead, so will you. That if Christ, who died for our sins, therefore our sins are forgiven. And what he is saying to us that is so incredibly important is, that therefore Christ stands as the head of a new humanity, but it is an absolute connection. It cannot be removed from a belief in a literal, historical Adam and Eve. Fellow Christians, if you profess faith in Jesus Christ, I will tell to you what I believe the biggest, most difficult, and most dangerous argument that I hear within the church of Jesus Christ today. This is not coming from outside the world. This is coming from inside the church. That we can dispense with a belief in a literal, historic Adam. What I will tell you is, the historic Adam, once you remove him, then what you're doing is, you're taking a golden strand. And when you begin to pull on that golden strand and remove it, the whole tapestry of what God has done is removed, because it falls apart because of what Paul says here: if Adam died, we all die; if Adam sinned, we all sin. But Christ, who on a Friday afternoon as God's Son offered himself for our sins, yet he was without sin. God took all of our sins and simply destroyed it by giving his wrath on his Son in our place. Therefore, because he was raised from death to life, he's victorious over sin and death. Therefore he is the new Adam, he is the second Adam, and he has begun a new humanity that everyone in this room is called and invited to participate in because of what Christ has done for you. There is no other antidote to the problem, and Christ has given it to us.

Secondly. The second reason the resurrection of the foundation is that he tells us that Christ is the firstfruits, then the second of those who believe. It's this: that what God has set in motion, he will bring to an end. When he says in verses 23 and so forth he says, "But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." What he is saying to us is this: that Christ, like new fruit coming out of the ground, out of the grave, has produced a new harvest. And if this is what has been done with Christ, we will follow in his wake if we believe in him. We, too, will become followers after him, our firstfruit. We will become a rich harvest of what Christ has done. That is important for Paul because it is linked to what I think is underneath this whole argument, that God the Father is sovereign. His purposes will not be thwarted by death or sin.

Thirdly, Christ is the final victory. When he says, "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all of his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." What is saying is that Jesus, by his original death on the cross and his resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, defeated death. Boom. However, death is still existent on the earth. It's still here. The principalities--Satan himself and all of his works and power--they're all set against God and his plan. So Christ reigns until the time he returns, and when he returns he will return as the final victor wherein all dominion and all authorities set over against God will be ultimately destroyed and placed under his feet. And the last enemy is death. By that he means your death. The last enemy is your death. So therefore to deny that we will receive physical, resurrected bodies is to deny the final victory of Christ. That is how important it is. Christ is the final victor.

And that is because God is all in all. That is the final foundation of the resurrection, because it is God who has been planning this out. This is God who has been unfolding this--God the Father. Which is why Paul is careful in saying everything will be under his feet, and not the Father. In essence he's saying, don't you see, God, who is spirit, set before all of time and all creation a plan whereby he would present himself to the world through his Son, who took on human flesh, and demonstrate to the world that God loves the world, has brought his Son to say what our biggest problem is, which is sin. To take on our sin and his wrath, to go to the grave, to then be raised on the third day, and then on the final victory Christ will come again, and he will be victorious over everything. Ten times in four verses Paul uses the word 'every' or 'all' because he's trying to demonstrate to these Christians and to us everything, all things, will be made right. And then at that moment our Savior, our mediator, will, as it were, say to the Father, "Here. It's yours." And God, who is all, will be whole.

And here is the one thing that we must never let go of. If this is not true, then there is no rhyme or

logic as to why we should care about the way we live today. It doesn't matter then what is right or wrong or whether I should love you or hate you or whether I should be serving or just purely self-interested. In other words, the resurrection that is to come, the fact that God will be all in all, means it draws a straight line from that event in the future straight to every one of our present lives. And he says, do you want to know what the foundation and the motivation are for why we ought to love, why we ought to forgive, why we ought to care and to serve? Because he's coming again, and what we do now is a reflection of what is to come. The kingdom of God through Christ, a new humanity, has begun and now we live as that new humanity because he's coming again as the King. Do you see the connection?

Paul didn't believe that the Corinthians heard his connection, and so here's the last portion, this final point: Coming to our senses. Now what Paul has been doing in these last few verses has been cogent, and they've been full of logic. Now in verses 29 through 34 he gets very short sentences, and he gets kind of odd. So let's look at it together: Coming to our senses. He simply outlines in verses 29 through 34 what this means, and here's what he says: "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day---I mean that, brothers---just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God---I say this to your shame."

Paul is saying, come back to your senses, and here's how he does it. He says if this is not true, then our practices as believers are absurd. But here's the problem. Verse 29. I've read a lot of commentators. I've looked at this. I have no idea what he's talking about. And I'm not alone in that. There is no example anywhere in the Bible or any extant letters anywhere that there was a Christian practice of those who are alive being baptized for those who were already dead. And what is also unclear is that Paul doesn't necessarily prohibit it, but he doesn't necessarily like, say, okay, just go do it. He just calls it out and says that okay, if this isn't true in the future, then what you're doing is absurd. So I'll just be honest with you, I have no idea. I don't. It doesn't make any sense, but there are mysteries. We'll let the Lord work that out and maybe he will tell us when the Lord comes again, and maybe we won't worry about it all, but I still have a few questions in that regard. And what I say is, I really looked at the best commentators I could and they simply outline options. And I will tell you usually when a commentator just lists for you options, that's a commentator way—a PhD way—of saying, 'I have no idea.' It doesn't distract at all from his core argument, however. The same is as true of our singing, our praying, our giving, our celebrating the Lord's Supper---that if this doesn't happen in the future, it's all absurd. We might as well just grab a coffee or tea or whatever it is you drink and whatever your favorite read is, and we should just go to Centennial Park.

Number two. Our practices are absurd, come back to your senses. The second thing is, versus 30 through 32, he's really saying to us a question: Really? That's what he is saying. I face death all day long, he says, in essence. Where he says, in another place, I face death everyday. I glory in you, Christians, he says. He then says, I fought wild beasts in Ephesus. Was that metaphorical, Paul? Were you really fighting beasts? Maybe he was talking about the arguments he was having with these heretics who were infecting the church. But this is what we know. He's saying that look, I wouldn't put up with you knuckleheads, if this wasn't true. Why would he bother? Why would he bother defending himself? Why would he bother putting his life in danger? Why would he bother working so hard? Because guess what, he says, if this isn't true, then just go out and be merry.

But he closes with this. He says in this last two verses: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, stop sinning; for there are some of you

who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame.” He's calling them out to simply say, bad theology leads to bad practice. The ‘Bad company corrupts good character’—do you see what he's doing? He's saying that a lack of belief and following in the teaching that there will be no bodily resurrection will directly affect how your character is formed, of whether you should be honest or a liar, of whether you should be faithful or self-centered. The reality is bad theology leads to bad practice. A denial of the bodily resurrection leads to licentious lives. And so he says without enumerating the sins, ‘Stop sinning.’ And I think what he's calling them to is calling them out of their unbelief. And then he exposes that there are those in their midst who are ignorant of God, and he says it to their shame.

But I say to you, the body of Columbia Presbyterian Church, I believe that you have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I perhaps believe that some of you may have been sitting here today going, well, you're preaching to the choir. I wonder sometimes how much we really hold the future reality of Christ raising our bodies from death to life for all eternity really does shape our daily lives. I say that not because I doubt you individually. I say that because I just wonder that if this is what Paul preaches to the church at Corinth, isn't this also a message for all eternity to Christ's church until he returns? Does the resurrection, does the certainty of the resurrection as it is given to us here, does it shape your daily life? Does it shape your worship? Does it shape your hope? For wherever there is brokenness, wherever there is disease, wherever there are circumstances that seem insurmountable, wherever there is sadness and tears, it will be conquered. There will be no more sin. There will be no more tears. There will be no more injustice. There will be no more death. There will only be life and life eternally.

I close with these simple words. The resurrection of Christ has absolutely determined our existence for all time and eternity. We as Christians do not merely live out the length of our days and then have the hope of the resurrection as an addendum to an already well-lived life. Rather, as Paul makes plain in this passage, Christ's resurrection has set in motion a chain of inexorable events that absolutely determines our present and our future. Christ is the firstfruits of those who are his, who will be raised at his coming. And that ought to both reform the way we currently live and reshape our worship into seasons of unbridled rejoicing. If you do not know Christ, and you have not tasted and seen that the Lord is good, you have just heard the invitation to the party that is the victory of Christ who died for you, and more than that, was raised from death to life for you, that all of us might know unbridled rejoicing.

Let's pray. By the power of your Holy Spirit, blow through by your presence a work of your renewing through the foundation of the resurrection. Lord, come as the King and head of a new humanity made perfect through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at your coming. Lord, make us a new people today who are shaped by that truth, who are led to do on earth as it is in heaven, to be caught up in unbridled rejoicing. We thank you and we praise you, in Jesus Christ, amen.