

1 Corinthians Part Two

Lesson #24, Chapter 15:29-49

Please read all of Chapter 15 before beginning your study. Each section ties in to the previous section so understanding the context is important.

1. First Corinthians 15:29 starts this lesson off with a bang! Whatever does Paul mean by his comments in this verse? As always, context saves the day and protects us from jumping to wrong conclusions about baptism, the dead, and the resurrection. So let's see what we can learn about this verse.
 - a. First, this verse is hemmed in by Paul's comments about the crucial nature of the resurrection.
 - b. Second, we know that once someone dies, there is nothing we can do here on earth to change their eternal destiny. It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
 - c. Third, the Greek word translated *for* can also be translated, “on behalf of” as the ESV does. Another legitimate—and even better translation choice—would be “because of” which fits the context perfectly. Verse 29 would then read, *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized because of the dead* [those believers who have already died]? *If the dead* [believers who have died] *are not raised at all, why then are they* [fellow living believers] *baptized because of them?* For a more detailed explanation of verse 29 see Pastor Jack Hughes' commentary in the boxes that follow.

Referring to 1 Corinthians 15:29, Jack Hughes commented in a sermon: “The entire chapter is about the resurrection. Keep in mind that both before and after this verse Paul is arguing for the resurrection. So, whatever this verse is talking about, it has to have some connection to the flow of the context, which is the resurrection.”

“Paul says in verse 29, *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?* Mormons say this verse teaches that we can save those who have died and gone to hell by being baptized for them. It would look something like this: Your Aunt Mary, the atheist, dies. You desire to rescue her from hell, so you are baptized for her, thus trying to earn her salvation for her and spring her from hell. However, this is not what Paul is saying. *So, what does he mean?*”

“Know that the phrase, “baptized for the dead” can also be translated in the Greek, *on behalf of*. So, it can read, *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized on behalf of the dead?* They are not being baptized in proxy for the dead or because their baptism can somehow affect the dead. No, they are baptized because of the testimony of those believers who have already died. Paul is telling the Corinthians, ‘Why be a Christian, why be baptized and why follow the faith of those Christians who came before you if there is no resurrection? Follow their example of obedience, faith, and trust and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.’”

“That is why he goes on to say at the end of the verse, *If the dead are not raised at all*, [speaking of believers who have died] *why then are they baptized* [the Corinthian believers] *for* [or better on behalf of] *them?* Why follow in the footsteps of deceased believers who have believed in Christ and been baptized if there is no resurrection. If they aren't going to be raised, neither will you.”

“Either believers who have died are going to be raised along with those who followed their faith or not. You can't have it both ways. Granted, it is a hard text to interpret. Yet even if the interpretation I have just given you is wrong; the Scriptures are clear that salvation is by grace and that no one by their actions can save someone who has died.”

- d. Paul is making a case for the importance of the resurrection in Chapter 15. What reasons are given for the importance and necessity of the resurrection from verses 1-28?
 - e. Now, in light of what we've learned about verse 29, how does the resurrection affect how believers live? See also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
2. How did the promise of the resurrection impact how Paul lived his life? See verses 30-32.
 3. Explain how Paul's willingness to put himself in danger for the sake of the gospel, and how the testimony of believers who have died, emphasizes the importance of the resurrection.

4. In verse 32 Paul quotes the Epicurean philosophers' who believed that this life on earth was all there was and that there were no eternal consequences for how they lived here. How is the promise of the resurrection an immediate cure for that pernicious philosophy?

5. Paul then focuses his sights on the Corinthians. Based on Paul's comments to them at the end of verse 32 and in verses 33-34, what kinds of wrong thinking were influencing how they lived?

6. How is the resurrection an antidote to sinful ways? See also Ephesians 5:6-17; Colossians 3:1-7.

7. In verse 34 Paul says we "ought to be" or "it is right to be" *sober-minded*. Verse 34 is the only time this particular word is used in the New Testament, but the following verses show its meaning: Romans 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10; 2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8. What do you learn about being sober-minded from those verses?

8. What is it about being *sober-minded* that is good for *every* Christian?

9. What are some ways you can apply this command to become sober-minded as you ought in light of our promised resurrection from the dead?

10. Verse 35 begins a rebuttal section where Paul answers or anticipates objections on the part of the Corinthians. How do you know he considers these objections a waste of time? See verses 35-36.

11. Even though Paul considers their objections foolishness he still takes the time to answer them—and aren't we glad he did? How does Paul's illustration about grain explain how God has prepared our earthly bodies for the resurrection? See verses 35-38.

12. Paul adds another layer of explanation in verses 39-41. What do you learn here about bodies?

Eager Beaver: What do you learn about the kinds of “flesh” mentioned in verse 39? Now read Genesis 1:24-25 which details just one part of Creation. How are these passages a rebuttal to the theory of evolution that says we were all generated from the same organism?

13. Paul then ties this new information from verses 39-41 to the resurrection in verses 42-44. What happens to our bodies in the resurrection?

14. What similarities do you notice between verses 42-44 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-4? What new information is given that encourages you?

15. Consider the promise of verse 44, *If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body*. For now, we live in this perishable, dishonored, weak, natural body, but there will come a day—a glorious day—when we will be raised in glory and power to live in an imperishable, spiritual body. That promise relies upon what we know is true; we now live in perishable bodies. And God intends for us to have that same assurance about the imperishable bodies that await us. What kind of encouragement does that promise bring to you today?

16. What comparison is made between Adam and Christ in verses 45-46? What does this information have to do with the point Paul has been making about the resurrection?

17. What point is Paul trying to communicate in verses 47-49?

18. Verse 49 states that we *will bear the image of the heavenly*. What will that heavenly body be like? See Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-29; 2 Corinthians 3:8; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2.

19. How would you answer the questions of verse 35 (*How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?*) based on what we've learned from verses 36-49?

20. Explain how Paul's discussion of our perishable bodies *now* and our imperishable bodies *to come* reveals another facet of God's lovingkindness for His children.

“As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly”; and we must begin to bear that heavenly image even now. As born again into the headship of the Second Adam, we should seek to be as much like the Second Adam as we are already by nature like the first Adam, through our first birth.”

“The second birth should be as operative to produce the image of the second Adam, as the first was to produce the image of the first Adam. Alas! “the earthy” is impressed upon us very distinctly; we cannot spend an hour without discovering the clear stamp of nature’s die. Oh, that “the heavenly” could be quite as clearly discerned!”

“This, therefore, we must aim at, though as yet we have not attained it. Here is something to be thought of very carefully, and I charge you, by the Holy Ghost, let your eyes look right on, and your eyelids straight before you, that you may be transformed from glory to glory into the image of the Lord. God grant that it may be so with every one of us!” ~Charles Spurgeon¹

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons: Volume 34*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon’s Sermons (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).