

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: I Corinthians 15A

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 15: 1-28

1. Witnesses of the Lord's resurrection: v. 1-11

In Chapter 15 Paul addresses the argument of some who said there is no resurrection [v. 12]. Influence of unbelievers and those who hear false doctrines and bring them into the church was a problem to the Corinthian church as it is with today's churches. Here, Paul sets the record straight about the resurrection of Christ by citing the attestation of the resurrection event by the following disciples:

- Seen by Peter and the 12 disciples: v. 5

- Seen by some 500 disciples at once, perhaps in Galilee, most of who were still alive at the time of the writing of this letter: v. 6

- Seen by James and all apostles: v. 7

- Seen by Paul: v. 8

Paul mentions two significant facts here regarding the appearance of the resurrected Christ:

First, Paul's mention of some 500 disciples seeing the risen Christ at once indicates they were in the same assembly when this event occurred. We note that Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for Him in Galilee through the angels [Matt 28:7], then He Himself told so to the women [Matt 28:10]:

But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." [Matt 28: 5-10]

So, we can surmise that most all believers, perhaps 500 in number, gathered together in Galilee to see the risen Lord according to His command. There, the risen Lord must have had a period of instructing and bolstering their faith. The witnessing of this 'convention' must have been widespread among the disciples so that Paul, who joined the Christian fellowship later, came to hear this story and wrote about it in this chapter.

Secondly, Paul insists that the risen Lord appeared to him as well as to other disciples. This indicates that the Christophany to Paul was not just a vision but a very 'real' experience -- so real that He believed firmly that he was meeting with the resurrected Lord as real as the disciples did. Through this real experience Paul could write in v. 3, *"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."*

When we experience a meeting with the risen Christ as Paul did, we also can testify with certainty as Paul did. He believed that he received this message and instruction from the Lord Himself [v. 11:23]. Let us pray earnestly to meet this risen Lord as very real experiences -- not as a head knowledge or as a theological lesson but meeting with Him personally.

Paul acknowledges himself as the least of the disciples -- calling himself as 'one born prematurely' [v. 8]. Why did he use such an expression? A baby that is born prematurely is not developed fully and is born in an unnatural way. Paul realized that he had not had the privilege of learning directly from the Lord as other apostles did. Furthermore, he had persecuted the church before his conversion experience [v. 9]. And he was acutely aware that he came to have a place in the ministry of Christian church through God's grace [v. 10]. Therefore, it was his desire to work harder than others so that this grace of God bestowed to him would not be in vain.

Like Paul we have been brought into God's family from our former life of sin and darkness through God's grace. When God created man, He made man in His image. And God voluntarily entered a covenantal relationship with man so that He was committed to their care for eternity and that the man owed its being to God including allegiance and obedience. Because of sin, however, the God image in us became a source of shame due to guilt of sin. Nevertheless, God's commitment and grace towards us have not changed. He keeps extending His mercy and grace to us. Our good deeds/works for God and for the humanity ought to be understood as Paul expressed, as our endeavors in response to such magnificent grace of God so that the grace would not be in vain, not as any contribution to our salvation, of which price has already been paid by Christ on the Cross for us.

2. Resurrected Christ -- foundation of our hope and of the gospel of Christ: v. 12-23

The resurrected Christ is central to the gospel of Christ, that is, the Christian religion. In v. 14 Paul emphasizes this fact clearly:

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty [v. 15:14]

Paul cites two reasons why the resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel of Christ:

First, the attestation of the disciples about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus would be false if there is no resurrection, that is, if Christ has not risen. If their testimony regarding His resurrection was false, what the gospel writers wrote about Jesus' words and ministry would lose all credibility. In fact, Koran, the Islam bible, speaks of Jesus as but a good teacher, not a risen Savior. He would be just one of many prophets recorded in the Scripture. He did not pay for our sins. The blood He shed on the cross did not have any salvific effect of saving souls from death to life if God had not raised Him from death.

Secondly, our hope of spending eternity with God in heaven would be in vain if the dead not rise in the resurrection as promised through the gospel. If there is no such hope of life eternal, then our hope is constrained to be only on the earth. If so, our endeavors of holiness as Christians trying to follow the example of Christ would all be in vain because all such endeavors and their rewards would end at the grave [v. 19]. How miserable would we be if our hope of eternal life with God was in vain?

Therefore, those who had brought in the false 'doctrine of no resurrection' was doing a deadly harm to the Christians at Corinth by negating the very validity of the gospel and nullifying the hope they had for eternity. Paul wanted to warn the Corinthians about this grave danger and have their faith set right on truth.

3. Lord's rule on the earth: v. 24-28

When cursing the serpent, a type of Satan, in Genesis 3 after the fall of Adam and Eve, God said to the serpent:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." [Gen. 3:15]

By sacrificing Himself on the cross, the woman's seed, Christ, foiled the purpose of Satan of spoiling God's plan of human salvation. But, in bruising the serpent's head Christ did not kill Satan. In fact, Satan has been allowed to be active on the earth. However, the time is coming, as Paul writes in these verses, when Christ shall put down under His feet all rule (dominions), all authority and power on the earth [v. 24]. When Christ comes to rule for 1,000 years, political powers and religious leaders of all nations in the world will be placed under His governance and power. There will be rebellions, but they will be crushed completely. God's wrath on human sins and rebellion will be laid on all unbelievers, rebellious and evil people without mercy so that this prophesy of bringing all things under the feet of Christ will come true [v. 25]. All enemies of God will be put under the feet of Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, even Satan and death [v. 26].

Discussion topics:

- 1. Do we believe in risen Christ as a fact? If any reservation, let us discuss.*
- 2. Are we waiting for the Lord's return? Do we look forward to this event?*