

LIFE GROUP
BIBLE STUDIES

1 CORINTHIANS
15-16



A 1 CORINTHIANS SERIES

R I S E N

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INTRODUCTION

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This is the last in our series of Bible studies in 1 Corinthians, in which we have been looking at the way that the apostle Paul has been responding to a range of concerns and issues in the church at Corinth which had been brought to his attention in various oral and written communications.

These concerns included a divisive party spirit in the Corinthian church, reports of sexual laxity and various disputes amongst the believers. As we have seen, Paul also offered advice and instruction on a range of other matters, such as marriage and divorce, food sacrificed to idols and spiritual gifts in the church.

However, in chapter 15 the apostle tackles a topic that clearly troubled him, a topic that may not have been directly raised in the Corinthians' original letter to Paul – in chapters 12-14 and chapter 16 the apostle begins with "Now concerning ...", but not in chapter 15.

What concerned him was that some of the believers in Corinth were denying the doctrine of the resurrection as Paul had taught it to them. And so he takes this crucial matter up, dealing with it in four major sections, the first two asserting that the resurrection will really happen (verses 1-34), and the second two covering his description of what the resurrection life will be like (verses 35-58).

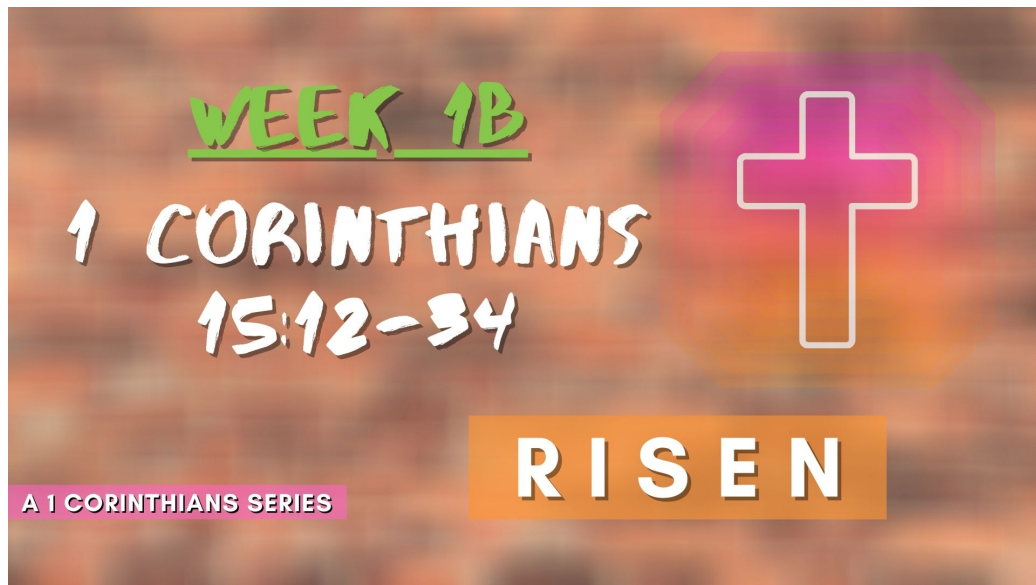
Chapter 16 (our final study in 1 Corinthians) is a closing epilogue to the whole letter, in which Paul deals with the practical matter of the collection of some money for the church in Jerusalem (verses 1-4), and follows with some miscellaneous concluding remarks about his future travel plans, and his companions and fellow leaders, before offering his final greetings and a closing benediction.

Each study opens with a brief summary of Paul's teaching in each of the sections covered in this series, followed by some questions and thoughts for reflection which those in life groups may wish to use as a framework for exploring Paul's teaching further, applying it to their own lives.



In our first study in this series (verses 1-11) the apostle Paul presents the resurrection of Christ as an integral element of the gospel that he had first preached to the Corinthians (verse 1). He follows this by reminding them of the gospel's saving grace when they first believed and of the Lord's appearances to many people following his resurrection (verses 2-7). He continues this section of the chapter with his own personal testimony of Christ's resurrection appearance to him (verse 8 – see Acts 9:1-19), closing with an affirmation of the gospel as that which binds him to all those he has mentioned in verses 5-7.

- What were your first impressions of the gospel when it was first preached to you? How well did you understand the significance of Christ's resurrection?
- How important is God's Word as spelled out by Paul in this passage? How can we ensure that God's Word is not neglected in our own Christian walk?
- The risen Lord appeared literally in his new body to those mentioned by Paul in verses 5-7, and in a vision to Paul on the Damascus Road. Have you experienced visionary experiences of the Lord? Share about this together.
- What does Paul mean when he writes "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (verse 10). How would you describe the work of God's grace in your own life?
- In verse 11, Paul stands firm on "this is what we preach" – what, for you, are the unchangeable central realities, or 'givens' of the gospel?
- Paul is not ashamed of presenting his own testimony of God's saving grace in his life. Share briefly with one another how you received the gospel "on which you have taken your stand" (verse 1).



The apostle now responds to those who, whilst confessing the risen Christ, deny the fact of the resurrection of the dead (verse 12)! Paul points out the logical inconsistency of such a claim in the next verse on the basis that the two go hand in hand (note the repetition in verses 13 and 16). And if no resurrection, then no salvation!

In verses 20-28 the apostle develops his argument by proclaiming Jesus' resurrection as the beginning of a process – he is the *firstfruits* of all who will follow (verse 23), illustrated by his contrast between Adam and Christ, death and life. “Then the end will come” (verse 24), when all evil is destroyed, including death itself, and Christ’s ministry is fully accomplished and God’s rule is finally established. Paul concludes the section (verses 29-34) with some practical arguments against those who deny the resurrection, drawing especially from his own experience as an apostle.

- What does the resurrection of Christ mean to you personally as a gospel reality, not just as a theological doctrine in which you believe?
- Discuss verse 19 together. Do you find yourself longing deeply for the resurrection life that is yet to come, and how for you does this contrast with the joy of life in Christ on earth *now*?
- “For as in Adam all die, so all in Christ will be made alive” (verse 22). In Romans 5:17 Paul declares ‘how much more’ we will reign in Christ in contrast to our death in Adam. What is the ‘how much more’ that you are looking forward to?
- Christ is the *firstfruits* of ultimate resurrection life (verse 23) – what first fruits of God’s salvation have you found most fulfilling and rewarding now on earth?
- What do you understand by the phrase “so that God may be all in all” (verse 28).
- In verse 31 Paul declares “I die every day”, followed by “I mean that, brothers”! What *does* he mean by that, and why can he say that? ... Can you?



The second half of the chapter (verses 35-58) contains Paul's richly evocative description of resurrection life, with a particular focus on the nature of the resurrection body (verses 35-49). It is likely that the Corinthians were influenced by a range of beliefs about life after death, but the one thing they had in common was a denial of the resurrection of the body.

In verses 38-41 the apostle uses illustrations from the natural world in order to help the Corinthians to imagine what this new body might be like: he draws from the botanical world (plants), the zoological (animals, birds, fish) and the celestial (heavenly bodies: sun, moon, stars). So, in response to a rhetorical question (verse 35), why should there not be another kind of *human* body after death?

And this resurrection body, speculates Paul, will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (verses 42-44), involving a radical transformation from an earthly body to a heavenly body. The final part of the chapter (verses 50-58) depicts Paul's rousing revelation of resurrection at the last day, with a concluding exhortation to stand firm (verse 58).

- Paul's teaching about the resurrection body demonstrates God's delight in *physicality*. What might this suggest for our physical lives now on earth? How does a material heaven with solid people make you feel?
- What do you understand by Paul's description of our new resurrection bodies as 'spiritual' (verse 44) in the light of his teaching in this passage?
- Why do you think Paul uses a number of different illustrations in verses 38-41 to help the Corinthians grasp the reality of a new resurrection body? How does each example serve his main argument in this passage?
- What does Paul mean in verse 51, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed ..."
- "For the perishable must close itself with the imperishable" (verse 53): our resurrection bodies will be gloriously different, but our personal *identities* will remain the same – what are the implications of this?
- What do you find most appealing and exhilarating about Paul's inspired speculation about our resurrection bodies in this passage?



In the final chapter of his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, the apostle Paul shifts gear as he addresses an issue that was on the minds of the believers there: how can they share in the collection to be raised for the Jerusalem church. A number of personal requests follow (verses 5-18) as Paul reveals some of his travel plans “if the Lord permits” (verse 7), updates the Corinthians on the movements of some of his fellow-travellers, and urges them to submit to the leadership of Stephanas and two of his companions (who were the likely bearers of the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians). The letter closes with greetings and a typical Pauline benediction.

- What does the Corinthians’ generosity in giving (see 2 Corinthians 8:10-11 and 9:2) say to us about the manner and destination of our own financial giving as a church?
- Paul clearly knew opposition to his ministry (verse 9 – cf. Acts 19:23ff. for example) but he was willing to persevere. How do we respond in the midst of adversity?
- What do Paul’s personal requests in verses 10-18 teach us about our need for one another in Christian ministry? What are the dangers involved for us all in ‘going it alone’ in ministry?
- Paul urges the Corinthians to be on their guard, stand firm, be courageous and strong, and always act in love (verses 13-14). How open are we to exhort another in a similar way?
- What might be the significance of Paul’s exclamation “Come, O Lord!” in verse 22 in the light of the issues addressed by the apostle *throughout this letter*?
- Share with one another what you have gained most from this first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.