

In this chapter, Paul demonstrates how illogical it is for a Christian to not believe in the resurrection. After showing that Christ's resurrection paved the way for our own resurrection, he then explains that our resurrected bodies will not be like our natural bodies because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Finally, he reveals the mystery of the rapture, in which some Christians will not experience death because their natural bodies will be simultaneously transformed into spiritual bodies alongside the resurrected saints.

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you" – In addition to everything Paul has just said concerning spiritual gifts in the previous chapter, he now wants to remind the Corinthians of the gospel that he preached to them. Some of the Corinthians apparently had become confused concerning the resurrection and Paul wanted to remind them that the gospel that he had preached to them included the resurrection.

"which also ye have received [to accept as true], and wherein ye stand [to be established]; By which also ye are saved" – Paul reminds the Corinthians that they had believed and accepted the truths of the gospel that he had preached to them and that their faith was built upon it. The truths of this gospel was also what had delivered them from their sins and given them the hope of eternal life.

"if ye keep [hold in firm possession] in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" – Paul mentions the possibility that some of the Corinthians had only a superficial belief in the gospel and thus had "believed in vain." Only those who held onto the truths of the gospel and depended on them for their salvation had truly been saved.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received" – The gospel that Paul had preached to the Corinthians was the same gospel that he believed when he was saved. He did not change it to make it more appealing to his audience.

"how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" – This gospel that Paul had passed on to the Corinthians included the death of Christ on the cross, which was in fulfillment of the OT scriptures. The death of the Messiah was predicted in prophetic writings as well as foreshadowed by the rituals, sacrifices, and feasts required by the Mosaic Law. Jesus Himself mentioned that His death fulfilled the scriptures when He met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection (**Luke 24:25-27** "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself").

"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" – The truths of the gospel did not stop with Jesus' death on the cross, but included the fact that He was buried and rose again on the third day, also in accordance to the predictions made in the scriptures. Paul makes it clear that the gospel that he preached included the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verses 5-11: The Corinthians did not have to rely only on Paul's word alone that Christ had risen from the dead. There were witnesses of the resurrected Christ and most of them were still alive and could testify to the truth of His resurrection. Paul was also a witness that Christ was alive, although he didn't consider himself worthy of such an honor because he had persecuted the church. For this reason Paul worked harder to spread the gospel than most other preachers, showing his gratitude for the grace that God had shown him in allowing him to be saved.

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Paul now addresses the reason he reminded them that the gospel he preached included the resurrection. Apparently some in the Corinthian church did not believe in the resurrection, so Paul questions the logic of this unbelief. How could they not believe in the resurrection when the gospel that they had believed for their salvation was built upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

If it were true that a belief in the resurrection of the dead was a false hope then Christ could not possibly have been raised from the dead. If Christ had not been raised then both Paul's preaching and the faith of the Corinthian believers was pointless because the gospel of Jesus Christ is built upon His resurrection.

15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

Paul continues to show how illogical it is for those who believe the gospel to not believe in the resurrection. If there were no hope of resurrection then Christ could not possibly have been raised from the dead, meaning that those who preach that Christ has risen from the dead are spreading lies about what God has done.

16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

Paul continues to take the belief that there is no resurrection to its logical conclusion to show that disbelieving the resurrection is illogical. **"For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins"** – The forgiveness of our sins through faith in Jesus Christ is built on Christ's resurrection from the dead. No resurrection means that Christ is not risen and the Corinthians' faith in Christ is built upon a lie. Faith built upon a lie is pointless and means that they have not been cleansed from their sins.

"Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" – If there is no resurrection then there is no hope those who have already died believing in Christ. They are dead and will remain that way with no hope of eternal life.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

The Greek word translated “most miserable” means “to be pitied.” If the benefits of being cleansed and forgiven of our sins do not extend beyond the grave, then Christians should be pitied more than anyone else because they have given up so much for Christ. If there were no hope of life beyond the grave then Christians might as well follow the saying “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (v. 32).

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.

After showing the illogical nature of not believing in the resurrection, Paul now returns to the truth that Christ has indeed risen from the dead and by doing so He has become the “firstfruits” of those who have died and will eventually be resurrected. Firstfruits represent the beginning of a harvest and Christ has paved the way for all who trust in Him to also be resurrected into eternal life (**John 14:19b** “...because I live, ye shall live also”).

Verses 21-50: Because Christ was raised from the dead, we will also follow Him and be raised from the dead. Paul then explains the resurrection, stating that the resurrected body will not be the same body that died. Our natural body will die but we will be resurrected in a spiritual body that is ready for heaven, because our natural body is incompatible with heaven (v. 50 “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption”).

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

“Behold, I shew you a mystery [previously undisclosed truth]” – In the Bible, a mystery is a truth that God waited for the appropriate time to reveal. Paul is now disclosing a truth that was not known in the OT and that God had presumably revealed to him.

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed [to exchange]” – This “mystery” is concerning the rapture of the church, which he describes in vs. 51-58. This passage parallels the reference to the rapture in 1 Th. 4:13-18, which each passage containing details not found in the other. After stating that we must be resurrected in a spiritual body before we can inherit the kingdom of God (v. 50), Paul reveals that not all Christians will experience death. An event will occur that will interrupt the natural course of life (birth, aging and death) for Christians alive when it happens. Not all Christians will die, but all of them will be “changed,” exchanging our natural body for a spiritual body. Theologians call this event “the rapture” (catching away) because of Paul’s statement that we will be “caught up” by Christ in 1 Th. 4:17.

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

“In a moment [atomos: an indivisible span of time], in the twinkling [blink] of an eye” – Paul is trying to express the shortest amount of time he possibly can. The rapture will occur so fast for both the dead and the living that you will not be able to catch it midway. It will literally be a “blink and you’ll miss it” event.

“at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound” – In the OT a trumpet was sounded to call the people of Israel out to meet God, as happened at Mt. Sinai when God established His covenant with Israel. (Ex. 19:16-19). This trumpet will call the church out of the world to meet God.

“and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” – Paul describes the rapture occurring in two parts: 1) the dead being raised first with incorruptible spiritual bodies; 2) the living Christians will be transformed, exchanging their mortal bodies for incorruptible spiritual ones (1 Th. 4:16-17).

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality” – Paul repeats the fact that our corruptible mortal bodies need to be changed to a form suitable for heaven before we can meet God face to face.

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality” – Once our bodies have been transformed...

“then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” – ...then we will experience the fulfillment of the promise that the LORD made concerning the total victory over death that He will give to His people. Paul quotes from **Isa. 25:8:** “*He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.*”

55 O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? 56 The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. 57 But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?” – Paul uses a verse from Hosea where God taunts death for its powerlessness against those to whom He chooses to give life. A bee can only sting once because it loses its stinger when it attempts to sting someone. Death has lost its sting when Christ died on the cross and so it can no longer sting those that Christ has redeemed.

“The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law” – Death had power over us because of our sin (the wages of sin is death - Rom. 6:23), and the law gave sin its power to condemn us (Rom. 7:8).

“But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” – However, Christ took the sting of death for our sin and gave us the victory.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to continue being faithful and serving the Lord because of their hope of eternal life through the resurrection.