

Take-Aways for Small Group Leaders to Consider

Commentary of the writer of this Guide in two parts.

Part 1 – Last Week

Earlier (v. 1-35).

Paul argues that Christ's resurrection is the ultimate validation of Paul's preaching and the church's faith.

Paul's arguments are aimed at affirming resurrection of the body to the people of his church in Corinth who were apparently skeptical about resurrection. Some commentators believe the Corinthians probably perceived Paul as an unsophisticated literalist Jewish preacher. [Some in ancient Mediterranean world saw the body as dark and corrupt from which enlightened persons should seek release.] Paul reacts "if Christ has not been raised," the whole foundation of the Christian faith has been removed and the gospel has no power to save us. If there is no resurrection, Paul states "not even Christ has been raised" (v. 13), "our preaching is useless" (v. 14), "so is your faith" (v.14), we are "false witnesses" (v. 15), "your faith is futile" (v. 17), "you are still in your sins" (v. 17), "those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost" (v. 18), and "we are to be pitied more than all men" (v. 19).

That was last week.

Part 2 – This Week

Now, verses 35-58.

Some of the Corinthians were saying there is no resurrection of the dead (v. 12), but at verse 35 Paul addresses those primarily concerned over bodily resurrections and how the body could be reanimated after death. Paul anticipates the objections to bodily resurrection by calling such a person a "fool" (someone who fails to consider God.). Paul insists that the concept of "resurrection of the dead" should not be naively understood to refer to the resuscitation of corpses; rather it entails transformation into a new and glorious state. Paul implies any fool should realize that.

Paul argues his case by analogies from nature [he compares the resurrection to plant life (v. 36-38), fleshly beings (v. 39) and heavenly and earthly bodies (v. 40-41)] and then states his central thesis of this section – the resurrection body is a spiritual body. "Spiritual Body" does not mean a nonmaterial body, but radically different – imperishable, glorious, and powerful (v. 42-44). Paul then shows a contrast between the natural body and the spiritual body (represented by Adam/Christ) (v. 44-49), and then says God's redeemed people must have new imperishable bodies to live with Him (v. 50).

We do not understand how this transformation occurs, but ***Paul stresses both continuity and transformation between the present life and the resurrected body.*** Paul says the body planted in death is not the same body that is resurrected. Paul tells us the transformation will be instantaneous, and "at the last trumpet" and that without transformation there is no hope of living with God forever.

Comments: (1) Bodily resurrection provides a new and improved body. Maybe we simply put on new, glorious, imperishable clothes. (2) A quick answer to resurrection might be - if God can create Adam from dirt, he won't have a problem with reassembling the dead. Besides, it's a miracle and we don't understand miracles: it's a mystery.

Some parts of this text are difficult to follow, but Paul is clear (1) the resurrection of the dead (grounded on a particular event in history – the rising from the grave of Jesus Christ) is necessary to affirm our Christian faith (only the resurrection of Jesus Christ offers a real possibility of transformation into new life with God), and (2) the God who made us will finally make us whole.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

The text for this week (the Resurrection of the Dead) is so intertwined with last week's text (the Resurrection of Christ) that it is difficult to discuss this text without also reconsidering last week's, as both are referred to in this Study Guide.

INTRO TO THE TEXT

1 Corinthians - The Challenges of Life Together

In Chapter 15 Paul addresses certain Corinthians beliefs about the resurrection. Paul insists the fundamental logic of the Christian faith demands belief in the resurrection of the dead and he seeks to develop in Corinth (and for us today) *the hope of resurrection as a powerful motivation for living*. This week continues a discussion of the root causes of the Corinthians' skepticism about resurrection. That skepticism was based on aversion to the idea that the body could be reanimated after death.

READ 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

ANALYZE THE TEXT

First, remember 15:1-34 and the importance of the resurrection of Christ in Paul's gospel.

Now, in verses 35-58:

1. Why were the Corinthians skeptical? They asked:
 - How are the dead raised?
 - With what kind of body are they raised?

Are these questions of people who are genuinely seeking to understand the truth?

2. How does Paul illustrate that the resurrection is not illogical but makes good sense?
3. How is the resurrection body related to, but different from, the natural body?

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

From a sermon the Sunday after Easter paraphrased.

Are you ready for the annual attempt to recover from the jolt of Easter and the resurrection? Over the years some of the best

intellectual defenses have been enlisted to cope with the outrage of Easter... and yet Christ keeps rising to us. In resurrection, God reiterates who He is. Christ has been raised from the dead and was returned to us. Scripture does not report Jesus sightings; it describes Jesus' appearances. There is an important difference. Resurrection is revelation, and both are entirely in God's hands: things God does alone. In resurrection God not only defeats death, but also overcomes our limited perception of God. Resurrection results in eternal life for us, but first comes appearance and revelation. [Summary of a Will Willimon sermon.]

Consider these questions as you move to the "apply section": Are the questions in this Corinthian text from people who know God or who have any appreciation of God? Do they want a relationship with God, or are they looking for excuses to avoid that relationship? (But to be fair, resurrection is a jolt!)

APPLY

1. Do we believe in the resurrection? Really?
2. Do you believe in a God of such radical grace that He will provide for your resurrection?
3. What do we believe about bodily resurrection?
4. What do you hope for after death?
5. Does the doctrine of resurrection instill in you hope as you stand by a grave or face death?

If willing, break up into groups of men and women for these questions and prayer:

1. Is belief in resurrection a problem in our day?
2. Do Paul's writings help you? How?

MEMORIZE 1 Corinthians 15:55

SOURCES

Will Willimon Sermon

Life Guide Bible Study – 1 Corinthians

Richard B. Hays Commentary