

LESSONS FROM CORINTHIANS 1 Corinthians 15:1-26

Today we conclude our summer series in 1 Corinthians with chapter 15 where Paul deals with the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection body. He addressed these topics because there was not only confusion in the church at Corinth about the resurrection but also disbelief in the resurrection of the dead.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead [1 Corinthians 15:12].

So, Paul writes the church saying that Jesus Christ's resurrection guarantees the believers' resurrection and that believers will receive a body that conforms to the glorious body of the resurrected Christ. Let me remind you that no one has experienced this resurrection except Jesus. There are places in the Old and New Testaments where individuals came back to life—e.g., widow of Zarephath's son; the Shunammite's son, Lazarus. But those cases are not the same as the resurrection that is coming when believers will receive a glorious body like that of Jesus's. Only One has experienced that resurrection thus far, and He is Jesus.

Today, rather than dealing with the many verses in chapter 15, which would be impossible to do anyway with our time restraints, I want for us to see how God from creation has planned for us to have life and live in fellowship with Him. Our future resurrection that will take place in conjunction with the return of our Lord is the culmination of God's plan for us to have life and live in fellowship with Him.

God is about life. He is the source of life. From breathing into man the breath of life in Genesis to the resurrection and continuation of life throughout all eternity, God is about life. From the beginning, God has set life and death before man, desiring that he chose life. God is the source of life and a relationship with Him gives life. A lack of relationship with Him results in death.

Everyone in this room has life and death set before him as options. We can choose God and have life, abundant life and eternal life. Or we can choose not to be in relationship to God and experience death—physical death, spiritual death and eternal death.

God has always given man the choice.

1. The Garden of Eden—the tree of life v. “you will surely die.”
2. The people of Israel with whom He made a covenant—“I have set before you life and death.”
3. Life and death set before us in Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” [John 3:16].

Everyone in this room is choosing one—life or death. The choice has always been there. Believers still face physical death, but our physical death does not separate us from God but serves as a door into His presence as we anticipate our resurrection.

Now, I want us to see how the God of life has always provided for man the provision of life and that His provision will culminate in our glorious resurrection in the future.

As you go through the Old Testament and the New Testament you find God's provision for life pictured through botanical figures. One reason for that is that as scripture opens He is pictured as a gardener, planting a garden in Eden. It is also because of the agrarian nature of the people of the Bible. They understood truth this way. When Paul talked about the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15, he explained it in terms of a seed springing forth into a plant.

Let's look at scripture's testimony to God's provision of life.

1. In Genesis, God, the gardener, planted a garden in Eden. In that garden was the Tree of Life. The word is actually in the plural, so it means the “tree of abundant life.” God offered life through a relationship with Himself. The offer was rejected and the first human pair was cut off from the tree of life. They were banished from the garden and prohibited access to the tree of a flaming sword.

2. But God is committed to the provision of life, so He planted another life-giving plant outside the garden within reach of man. This planting was Israel who was to bring God's offer of life and blessing to the world. That imagery is pictured in Isaiah 5.

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress [Isaiah 5:7].

Again, as in Eden, God provided what was needed but He was rejected.

I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against Me into a corrupt wild vine [Jeremiah 2:21]?

3. But God is committed to the provision of life so out of the stump of the people who failed Him—specifically out of the line through which He promised to work—another plant came.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit [Isaiah 11:1].

Once human glory is brought low and human achievement appears as nothing, then God can take over.

The word for "Branch" or "sprout" is *netser*. It referred to Jesus Who would come. When Mary and Joseph returned with Jesus from Egypt, Matthew said—

...and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene" [Matthew 2:23].

Notice the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener [John 15:1].

Thus He was able to say—

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" [John 10:10].

The fruit of this vine is His blood by which we have life.

"This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" [Matthew 26:28].

As we abide in this vine, we live, are fruitful [John 15] and are guaranteed the resurrection. The vine lives and so do we. The vine has been resurrected, and so will we. That is Paul's defense in 1 Corinthians 15.

When Paul speaks of our resurrection guaranteed by Christ's, he uses another botanical figure from the Old Testament called "first fruits." "First fruits" refers to the cutting of the first sheaf of barley following the 7th and final day of the Unleavened Bread festival. It happened on a Sunday. The word "first fruit" means "a promise to come." A sheaf was waved as a sample of the harvest that would follow. Paul took this figure and repeatedly referred to the resurrection of Jesus as "first fruits."

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [1 Corinthians 15:20].

Jesus was firstfruits—the first sheaf of the harvest—with the promise of more of the same harvest to come. Jesus's resurrection guarantees ours. That is Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15.

Thus, we see that God, the source of life, will achieve His plan of having a people who will live with Him for all eternity.

Listen to these words of victory.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep....But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes those who belong to Him. Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until

He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death [1 Corinthians 15:20, 23-26].

God has always offered life. That offer is within the reach of every person. The alternative is death—physically and eternally. Who would not want to choose life that comes through Jesus Christ?

The fact of death cannot be denied. All die. It is 100%. The fact of life cannot be denied—Jesus lives. Choose life.