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The Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15

Part 2

By Jim Myers

The significance of the resurrection to Paul is made clear by the fact that it is the longest unbroken discussion in the whole epistle and occupies all of chapter 15. Paul places the resurrection into a prophetic environment, which makes the resurrection of Jesus an event much more significant than just a miraculous event that any resurrection would be (15:3-4):

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ** died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day **according to the Scriptures**.

Paul basis his argument on the this being a fulfillment of “scripture,” but, he did not provide his readers with any clue as to which scriptures he meant. The lack of that reference has generated many debates among church leaders and theologians for many centuries.

One other point concerning the above verses is that Paul uses the title “Christ” instead of the name “Jesus.” This title and the resurrection are welded together in the mind of Paul, which may be seen in Romans 1:4 --

“who **was declared the Son of God** with power **by the resurrection** from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Who was the “Son of God,” he was the Messiah or, in Greek, the Christ. Paul made it very clear that he believed that God declared Jesus to be the “Son of God” or “Christ” **by the resurrection**. This became a point of contention between Paul and the writers of the Gospels (written decades later). For them, the divine declaration was made at the baptism of Jesus, not the resurrection.

After stating that the purpose of the death of Christ and his resurrection were events that had been foretold in scripture, he next provides a list of witnesses who actually saw the Christ after the resurrection. The list is in verses 5-8:

- (1) *Cephas*
- (2) *the twelve*
- (3) *more than five hundred brethren at one time*
- (4) *James*
- (5) *all the apostles*
- (6) *Paul*

This list is very interesting and probably reveals some of the sectarian conflicts that existed during the first century of Christianity. The New Testament makes it very clear that there were conflicts between Peter (Cephas) and Paul, which continued between their later followers (Galatians 2:11):

But when Cephas came to Antioch, **I** **opposed him to his face**, because he was wrong.

Does the positioning of Cephas first and Paul last reflect Paul's followers view that even though Jesus began with Peter, he finished his work with Paul. Paul's books and Acts present accounts that indicate that Peter didn't understand what the resurrected Jesus wanted, i.e., *the inclusion of Gentiles in the Jesus Movement*. Paul, on the other hand, seems to be on track after the vision.

Do the writings of Cephas (Peter) substantiate the claims made in 1 Corinthian 15?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who **raised Him from the dead** and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:20-21).

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).

Clearly the resurrection holds a central place in the writings of Peter. However, unlike Paul, we find no claim that the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. I would think that this would be such a significant event that Peter would have opened his book with it, wouldn't you?

Number 2 on Paul's list are "the twelve," while **number 5** is "all of the apostles." The initial thought concerning the first group is that "the twelve" must have been the original twelve apostles that Jesus selected. However, since Judas was one of them, the question is raised as to who "the twelve" actually were. Did the Christ appear to Judas or to his replacement, since Judas was supposed to be dead?

As far as "all of the apostles," the general opinion among scholars seems to be that this was a much large group than "the twelve" who were appointed later. The **Book of Acts** reports that there were others and that they held important positions in the early community of Jesus followers.

Number 3 on the list are "more than 500 brothers." This event is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. The Anchor Bible provides us with the following information:

The only other sizeable groups mentioned in other books are the 120 (Acts 1:15) and the unspecified number assembled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Since Paul never equates the reception of the Spirit with an appearance of the risen Christ, any identification of numbers here would be questionable. . . The additional detail that "some have died" has at least two points of reference. Witnessing the resurrection did not grant immediate immortality. . . (and) to expectations of Christ's "return," which Paul will take up later in this chapter (p. 322).

Number 4 on Paul's list is **Jacob** or James as English translators choose to name him. Can't you just imagine the looks a first century Jew would have gotten in Jerusalem if he had been called "James"! Jacob was the head of the Jerusalem Council and leader of the Jesus Movement in Judea. He was also the brother of Jesus. Jacob, like Peter, produced writings (**The Book of James**) which is included in the New Testament. Jacob, also like Peter, fails to mention the Christ appearing to him after the crucifixion. However, Jacob, unlike Peter, says nothing about the resurrection. James 1:21 reflect the theme of his message –

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to **save** your souls.

To be continued in the next issue.

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