

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART SIXTEEN

After his detailed discussion of spiritual gifts, how God uses different members of His church to help others, whether by speaking or by serving practically, Paul moved in chapter 15 to the vital question of what message we speak. He reminded the Corinthians that the Christian gospel is based above all else on two vital facts of history to which we have responded by faith. Jesus died on the cross for our sins - and Jesus rose again 3 days later to give us life.(15:1-4) No-one would have disputed the fact of His crucifixion, but some were doubting His resurrection, and teaching others that it did not happen. Because this was Corinth, the practical businessmen were probably saying that it did not matter anyway because it was only an issue between theologians; it did not seem to affect their lives and their businesses.

Paul spent a whole chapter insisting that it does matter and showing why. First he pointed to the evidence for the truth of the resurrection, the numerous eyewitness accounts, Peter, the apostles, 500 believers, James - probably Jesus' brother - the apostles again, and finally Paul himself.(15:5-8) He wondered at his own amazingly privileged position as a former persecutor of the church. It all goes to prove how gracious God is!(15:9,10) On the unanswerable testimony of so many, their faith had been based.(15:11)

One thing leads to another. If there is no life after death, Jesus did not rise. If Jesus did not rise then faith and preaching is pointless, all those who preach that He did are liars, and sin has not been taken away.(15:12-17) There would be no future for those already dead, and for those alive, faith would be futile.(15:18,19)

On the other hand, because the resurrection of Christ is a fact, resurrection life is available to all of us, just as the fact of Adam's sin caused death for all of us. First Christ rose, then we will when He returns. Christ will reign over all, but in submission to His Father who in turn will give complete victory to Him.(15:20-28) So much hinges on the resurrection!

Paul explained a further series of implications of Christ's resurrection. Some people were being baptised on behalf of the dead. That would be pointless if Christ had not risen. So would his own daily risking of death for the sake of the gospel. We might just as well please ourselves if death is the end. Some had already taken that approach because of such teaching; Paul urged them to get back to the message and lifestyle with which their Christian faith began.(15:29-34)

One of the reasons some were doubting the resurrection was because they were seeing it simply in terms of their present bodies revived. Paul explained that resurrection bodies would be of a totally different order. The old body is like a seed, insignificant compared with the magnificent plant which will grow after it is sown in the ground.(15:35-38) In every way our new bodies will be glorious compared with what we have now. They will have an imperishable, honourable, powerful quality which we can now only dream about.(15:39-44) The most important change however will be a spiritual one. Sin and all its consequences will be gone. Again it is the contrast between Adam after the fall and Jesus. We will be like Jesus.(15:45-49)

How and when will this happen? We will have to wait and see. It will happen when Jesus returns, and it will be immediate for both the dead and those still living. It will be the end of sin, death, the law, defeat and all their effects upon man and his world. Being certain of the resurrection now makes an enormous difference to how we live. Do not let anyone shake your confidence in this vital fact of history!(15:50-58)

As usual in his letters Paul concluded with some personal messages, for which all that had gone before would provide a spiritual basis.

16:1-4 Q.1 What instruction does Paul give us about collecting money as a church? When and how should we do this? And for what reasons? What should we do with money once we have collected it? Why is this? How does this demonstrate grace?

16:5-9 Q.2 Where did Paul expect to be in his travels? Was he always certain where he would go and for how long? If not, why not? What helped him to know when to move and when to stay? What result of a visit somewhere did he expect? How does this also explain grace?

16:10-12 Q.3 What part did Paul play in planning other people's travel and ministry? What would have been the value of his commendation of Timothy and Apollos? How does this too illustrate grace?

16:13,14 Q.4 For what reason were they to be alert?(I Pet.5:8; Matt.25:13) How did Paul sum up the key principles of effective Christian living? Give modern examples of what he meant?

16:15-18 Q.5 For what reason did Paul mention four of the Corinthians by name? What do we know about each of them? What effect did he anticipate his instructions would have upon the church?

16:19-24 Q.6 Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? What value was there in his reference to Aquila and Prisca? What role had they played in the church in Corinth?(Acts 18) How would their example be a help? Just what is the purpose of Christian greetings? How does the end of the letter confirm the reason for writing it?