SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY

1 Corinthians

Chapter Fifteen

The Resurrection Chapter — Christ Is Risen, Death Is Swallowed Up, and Our Labor Is Not in Vain

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | TWO VOICES

A single chapter, read through two teachers — **John MacArthur** and **David Guzik**.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

Fifty-eight verses

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contents

1 Corinthians 15 — Everything stands or falls on an empty tomb

—	**How to Read This Study** · *the two voices & their colors*	3
—	**Before the Chapter** · *a church that doubted the future*	3
I	**The Gospel of First Importance** · *1 Corinthians 15:1–11*	4
II	**If Christ Has Not Been Raised** · *1 Corinthians 15:12–19*	5
III	**The First Fruits and the End** · *1 Corinthians 15:20–28*	6
IV	**Why Risk Anything?** · *1 Corinthians 15:29–34*	7
V	**Sown a Seed, Raised in Glory** · *1 Corinthians 15:35–49*	8
VI	**We Will All Be Changed** · *1 Corinthians 15:50–58*	9
†	**At a Glance** · *the two voices side by side*	11
†	**Key Facts & Questions for the Table** · *discussion*	11

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead." — 1 Corinthians 15:20

SECTION I · THE CHAPTER

1 Corinthians 15

The Resurrection of Christ and the Resurrection of His People

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 15 movement by movement. At each stop you will hear the same two teachers, and each one is marked in his own color — a highlighter for the ear as much as the eye. The Scripture blocks quote the key phrases of each movement with ellipses; read the full chapter in your own Bible alongside. **MacArthur** presses the text for its plain meaning, the certainty of the gospel facts, and the hope of Christ's return; **Guzik** walks the history, the Greek, and the pastoral application. On this chapter the two men stand very close together, and their agreement is worth hearing twice. It is the longest chapter in the letter, so sit with it.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

† Before the Chapter

Paul has spent fourteen chapters correcting a divided, proud, and disorderly church. He has saved the deepest problem for last. Some in Corinth were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. They did not deny that Jesus rose; they denied that believers would. The idea fit the Greek mind of their city, which looked on the body as a prison for the soul and found the thought of a raised body foolish. Paul shows them that the two cannot be separated. Deny the one and you have denied the other, and with it the whole gospel.

So the chapter moves from history to hope. It begins with the facts that were handed down — Christ died, was buried, was raised, and was seen. It reasons through the consequences if those facts were false. It sets out the order of the resurrection and the end of all things. It answers the skeptic who asks what kind of body the dead will have. And it ends in a shout of victory and a charge to keep working. **MacArthur** reads it as the doctrinal heart of the Christian faith; **Guzik** reads it as the reason a believer can face the grave and still get up in the morning to serve. Between them they leave one question: if Christ is risen, what are you living for?

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

The Gospel of First Importance

What was received and handed on: Christ died, was buried, was raised, and was seen

> *"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved… 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, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now… and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also… But by the grace of God I am what I am."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-10 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur notes the three tenses in Paul's opening: the Corinthians *received* the gospel, they *stand* in it, and they *are saved* by it. The condition that follows — *if you hold fast* — does not make salvation uncertain for a true believer; it distinguishes real faith, which endures, from a shallow profession that was never saving at all. Genuine faith perseveres.

The heart of the gospel is a set of historical facts, and MacArthur sees each one as essential. Christ died *for our sins* — a substitutionary death. He was buried, proving He was truly dead. He was raised on the third day, and all of it happened *according to the Scriptures*, fulfilling what God had promised. Then come the witnesses: Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred at once, James, all the apostles, and finally Paul. MacArthur points out that most of the five hundred were still alive when Paul wrote, so anyone could have checked. The resurrection is not a private vision; it is attested history. And Paul, the former persecutor, stands as living proof that grace transforms.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik emphasizes that Paul passed on what he himself received. The gospel is handed down, not invented, and its benefit belongs to those who keep holding on to it. The Corinthians had received it well and were standing in it, but they still needed to hold fast, because belief that is not sustained can prove empty.

The gospel rests on real events. Guzik describes the brutality of crucifixion and explains Christ's death as bearing God's judgment for sin in our place. No one saw the resurrection happen, but many saw the risen Jesus. He argues that the apostles' changed lives and their willingness to die for this testimony make fraud or hallucination implausible, and he suggests Paul left the women out of his list because their testimony carried little legal weight in that culture. Paul calls himself the least of the apostles, yet says God's grace both made him what he was and powered his hard work. Whichever apostle preached, the message was the same.

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19

If Christ Has Not Been Raised

Paul follows the denial to its end, and everything collapses

> *"Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?... and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins... If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur walks the logic link by link. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised, because He was truly dead. If Christ was not raised, the apostles' preaching is empty and the Corinthians' faith is empty. The apostles are then false witnesses, testifying that God did something He did not do. The believers are still in their sins, because a dead Savior has not conquered sin. Those who have died in Christ have simply perished. Remove the resurrection and nothing of Christianity is left.

Verse 19 is the hinge. If our hope in Christ reaches only to this life, we are the most pitiable people on earth, because we have given up the pleasures of the world for nothing. MacArthur sees this as the reason Christianity is not a moral philosophy or a self-help program. It is a faith built on a historical event and aimed at eternity. If the event did not happen, the faith is worthless; because it did, the faith is everything.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that the Corinthians accepted Christ's resurrection while doubting a general resurrection of the dead, and he traces that doubt to Greek philosophy and to the kind of thinking found among the Sadducees. Paul shows that their position will not hold: deny the second and you have undermined the first.

He lays out the chain of consequences: preaching and faith would be empty, the apostles would be false witnesses, sins would remain unpaid, and the dead in Christ would be lost. He also lists the doctrines that rest on the resurrection, including justification and new birth. Without it, he says, the Christian life would be the most pitiable existence of all. With it, every sacrifice is an investment.

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

The First Fruits and the End

Christ first, then those who are His at His coming, then every enemy under His feet

> *"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end… For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death… so that God may be all in all."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

But now — MacArthur hears the turn from the nightmare of verses 12–19 to the reality. Christ has been raised, and He is the first fruits. In Israel the first sheaf of the harvest was offered to God as a pledge that the rest of the harvest would follow. Christ's resurrection is that pledge. As Adam's sin brought death to all who are in him, so Christ brings life to all who are in Him.

MacArthur reads verses 23–24 as a sequence. Christ rose first. Those who belong to Christ will be raised *at His coming*, which he connects with the gathering of the church to the Lord. Then comes the end, when Christ, having reigned and put down every rival authority, hands the kingdom to the Father. MacArthur sees in *He must reign* the earthly kingdom of Christ that follows His return, and he notes that death itself is the last enemy to fall. When the Son submits to the Father, it is not inferiority of nature but the completion of His mission, so that God may be all in all.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik explains the first fruits as both a representative of the harvest and a guarantee that it is coming. He sets Adam and Christ side by side, as Paul does in Romans 5: through one man came death, and through another comes resurrection. Order matters. Christ rose first, and believers follow at His coming. Guzik notes that people such as Lazarus were brought back to life but not resurrected; they died again. Jesus is the first to rise in a glorified body that will never die.

At the end, Christ hands the kingdom to the Father after every enemy has been subdued, and death is destroyed last. Guzik is clear that the Son's submission reflects His role, not any lesser essence; Father and Son are equal in nature. He ties the closing phrase, *God may be all in all*, to the eternal glory the persons of the Trinity give to one another.

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29-34

Why Risk Anything?

A puzzling practice, a dangerous life, and a call to wake up and stop sinning

> *"Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? Why are we also in danger every hour?... If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.' Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:29-34 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

Verse 29 is one of the hardest in the New Testament, and MacArthur notes that it has been given dozens of interpretations. He rules out any idea of baptizing on behalf of the dead to save them; nothing in Scripture teaches that, and Paul does not endorse such a thing here. He favors the reading that some came to faith and were baptized because of the witness of believers who had died — wanting to be reunited with them. Either way, Paul's point is simple: such baptism makes no sense if the dead are never raised.

Paul then points to his own life. He faced danger every hour and died daily to himself. Why do it, if there is no resurrection? If death ends everything, the rational philosophy is *eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.* MacArthur sees the moral warning in verse 33 as the real danger in Corinth: bad theology keeps bad company, and false teaching about the future always corrupts conduct in the present. Wake up, Paul says, and stop sinning.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik says Paul mentions the practice without approving it; he simply uses it to show that it would be pointless without a resurrection. Guzik rejects the Mormon use of the verse to support proxy baptism for the dead. Paul's constant danger and suffering would also be foolish without a future hope, and Guzik takes the "wild beasts" at Ephesus as most likely a figure for violent human opponents.

Without the resurrection, the logical response is to eat and drink, and Guzik compares that outlook with the under-the-sun view of Ecclesiastes. Paul then quotes a line from a pagan writer: bad company corrupts good character. Believers should wake up to righteousness. The Corinthians' confusion about the resurrection was not only an intellectual problem; it reflected a deeper moral one, and their ignorance of God was to their shame.

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49

Sown a Seed, Raised in Glory

What kind of body? One as different from this one as the plant is from the seed

> *"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?' You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies… So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body… The last Adam became a life-giving spirit… Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-49 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

The skeptic's question was meant to ridicule, and Paul answers it bluntly. MacArthur notes that every farmer already knows the answer. A seed goes into the ground and dies, and what comes up is the same life in a far greater form. There is continuity — it is the same person — and there is transformation. God already gives a vast variety of bodies in creation, of men, animals, birds, fish, sun, moon, and stars, each fitted for its realm. He is fully able to give a body fitted for eternity.

The four contrasts describe that body: imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. MacArthur stresses that *spiritual body* does not mean a body made of spirit. It is a real body, wholly governed by the Spirit and suited to heaven, just as the natural body is suited to earth. The pattern is

Christ Himself. The first Adam became a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. We bore Adam's image in our bodies of dust, and we will bear Christ's image in bodies like His glorious one.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik says the first part of the question is simple: God raises the dead. The seed shows the rest. What is planted dies and becomes something different from what was sown, and God gives it the body He pleases. Guzik speaks of burial as sowing, and he argues that God does not need every original atom to reconstitute a body; the same God who made it can raise it.

Creation has many kinds of bodies, each with its own glory, and the resurrection body will be suited to eternity as ours is suited to earth. Guzik suggests there may even be degrees of glory among believers. He emphasizes how glorious the four contrasts are against the decay of death, and he points to Jesus' own risen body as the pattern: physical, able to eat, recognizable, yet not bound by ordinary limits. We bear the earthly image now; we will bear the heavenly one.

VI
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

We Will All Be Changed

A mystery revealed, death swallowed up, and a charge to stand firm and keep working

"Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God… Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed… 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

Our present bodies, flesh and blood, cannot enter the eternal kingdom as they are. They must be changed. Then Paul reveals a *mystery*, something not made known before: not every believer will die. MacArthur reads this as the rapture of the church. When Christ comes for His own, the dead in Christ will be raised and the living will be transformed in an instant — the Greek word behind

moment is the root of our word “atom,” a moment too small to divide. He sees the last trumpet as the trumpet that gathers the church, not the trumpet judgments of Revelation, and he holds that this event comes before the tribulation.

Then Paul quotes Isaiah and Hosea and taunts death itself. Death’s sting is sin, and sin draws its power from the law that condemns it; but Christ has paid for sin and fulfilled the law, so death has nothing left to strike with. MacArthur closes on verse 58 as the practical point of all this doctrine. Because the resurrection is certain, believers should stand firm, refuse to be moved, and pour themselves into the Lord’s work. Nothing done for Him is ever wasted.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik agrees that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, so the mortal body must be transformed. Not all believers will die; those alive at Christ’s return will be changed in a moment at the last trumpet. He discusses the rapture, what the last trumpet means, and the way Paul speaks of the timing as near. He also holds that the believers who have died are with the Lord now, and their bodies will be raised on that day.

Death is swallowed up in victory, and Paul taunts it as a defeated enemy. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but the victory is given through Jesus Christ. Guzik adds a sober note: for those outside of Christ, death remains an enemy. For those in Christ, the future resurrection gives present work eternal meaning. Stand firm, he says, and keep working, because labor in the Lord is never in vain.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Two voices, one chapter

The same chapter, read two ways — and on this chapter the two readings run very close. MacArthur presses the historical facts of the gospel, the logic of the resurrection, and the order of the coming kingdom; Guzik walks the witnesses, the seed, and the pastoral comfort of a body raised in glory. Both close on the same charge: because Christ is risen, stand firm and keep working.

THE MOMENT	MACARTHUR · conviction	GUZIK · detail & heart
The gospel (15:1–11)	Historical facts according to the Scriptures; checkable witnesses; true faith perseveres.	Handed down, not invented; changed lives make fraud implausible; grace made Paul.
If not raised (15:12–19)	Remove the resurrection and nothing of Christianity is left.	Greek and Sadducean doubt; justification and new birth rest on the resurrection.
First fruits (15:20–28)	Christ, then His people at His coming, then the kingdom and the end.	A guarantee of the harvest; Lazarus revived, not resurrected; the Son's role, not lesser nature.
Why risk it (15:29–34)	Hard verse, no proxy salvation; bad theology corrupts conduct.	Paul does not endorse the practice; without hope, Ecclesiastes' "eat and drink."
The body (15:35–49)	Continuity and transformation; a real body governed by the Spirit.	God raises the dead; Jesus' risen body is the pattern; perhaps degrees of glory.
The change (15:50–58)	The rapture of the church in an instant; death disarmed; labor not in vain.	Living believers changed, the dead with the Lord now; death still an enemy outside Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 15 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Facts to Carry

- **15:3–4.** Died, buried, raised on the third day — each one "according to the Scriptures." MACARTHUR
- **Five hundred.** Most of the witnesses were still alive when Paul wrote, so the claim could be checked. MACARTHUR
- **The doubt.** Corinth accepted Christ's resurrection but denied the resurrection of believers, shaped by Greek thinking about the body. GUZIK
- **First fruits.** The first sheaf offered to God was the pledge of the whole harvest to come. GUZIK
- **Four contrasts.** Perishable to imperishable, dishonor to glory, weakness to power, natural to spiritual (15:42–44). GUZIK

❖ **“In a moment.”** The change happens in an instant too small to divide, at the last trumpet. MACARTHUR

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul calls the death, burial, and resurrection “of first importance.” What have you let crowd it out?**

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3

2 **If Christ had not been raised, what in your life would look exactly the same?**

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19

3 **What company is shaping what you believe about the future — and how you live now?**

Bad company corrupts good morals.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33

4 **How does the picture of the seed change the way you stand at a believer’s grave?**

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:43

5 **What work for the Lord have you been tempted to think is wasted?**

Your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

❖

Corinth wanted a faith for this life and a vague hope for the soul. Paul gives them something better: a risen Savior, a raised body, a coming kingdom, and a victory over death that is already won. Doctrine this large has a simple application. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Scripture: New American Standard Bible® (NASB), © 1960-1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. · The teacher sections are the study author’s faithful summaries — not verbatim quotations — of John MacArthur and David Guzik (Enduring Word) on 1 Corinthians 15. Consult each author’s own work for his exact words. · Smith For Christ New Testament study series.