

**Small Group  
Leaders Notes  
1 Corinthians 15**

## Small Group Leader Notes

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

#### Context

- **“Stand firm”**
  - Have a look at 15:1-2 and 15:58. How does the chapter begin and end? Are there any words or themes that are repeated?
  - Notice the repetition of ‘standing.’ In v1-2 the Corinthians have taken their stand on the gospel that was preached to them and if they continue to stand firm/holy firmly to it then they will be saved. Then at the end of the chapter, in light of all he has taught, Paul urges them to ‘stand firm.’
  - Notice too the repetition of ‘in vain.’ If they don’t stand firm in the gospel then they will have believed ‘in vain’ (v2). Positively, if they do stand firm in the gospel and their belief in the resurrection then their labour in the Lord is ‘not in vain.’
  - Putting all this together we can see that the big aim of the chapter is for Christians to stand firm in the gospel of Christ’s death and his resurrection.
- **“How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”**
  - 15:12 makes it clear that there were some people in Corinth who were claiming that there was no bodily resurrection of the dead. This is in keeping with what we see elsewhere in the letter. There seems to have been a group in Corinth who believed that the Spirit is all that mattered and therefore what we do with our bodies doesn’t matter. For example go and read 6:15-16.
  - It seems that these people were arguing that there would be no bodily resurrection of believers. Maybe they thought that only the Spirit would be raised from the dead, maybe they didn’t even believe that the Spirit would be raised. Either way our bodies don’t matter and they have no future.
  - It’s worth stopping and thinking about how we see this sort of thinking around us today. The idea of a bodily resurrection from the dead is a joke to most people today. To most people it is just naive wishful thinking. Atheism tells us that life is all there is. You only live once so you must make the most of it and do whatever you like with your body because when you die it will just rot. We’re told to forget about death because death is the end of everything, it’s the great oblivion. When you die you cease to exist. Though 1st century Corinthian culture and 21st century British culture seem very different they actually have much in common. This means that 1 Corinthians 15 will be very helpful for us as we seek to stand firm in the gospel as we live surrounded by a culture that says there’s no resurrection from the dead.

#### Structure

- The passage neatly falls into two sections;
  - v1-11 - Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached and they had believed.
  - v12-19 - The implications if there is no resurrection from the dead.
- These two sections fit together because in v1-11 Paul reminds them of where they had taken their stand. Then in v12-19 he shows them what will happen if they step away from the solid ground of the resurrection.

## **Notes on some Tricky Bits**

- ***Which Old Testament scriptures said that Christ would die and be raised from the dead?***
  - Paul twice stresses that the events of the gospel happened “according to the scriptures (Old Testament.)
  - There are many Old Passages that look forward to Christ’s death such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52-53. Similarly there are a number of passages that looked forward to the resurrection. For example; Psalm 16:9-10, Psalm 56:13, Psalm 116:8 and Hosea 6:2.
- ***“Are these the only people Jesus appeared to after the resurrection?”***
  - The list of resurrection appearances that Paul gives is not an exhaustive list. There are appearances recorded in the gospels that Paul doesn’t mention (e.g. Jesus appearing to Mary in John 20.) Similarly there are appearances that Paul mentions here that are not mentioned in any of the gospels (e.g. the appearance to 500 brothers and sisters at the same time.)
  - To see why Paul mentions this appearances and not others we need to look at the surrounding verses to see what he’s trying to do in this section. We have already seen that he wants to remind them of the gospel that he preached to them (v1-2). He wants to show the Corinthians the reliability of the gospel that he preached to them. In v11 he shows them that the gospel he preaches is the same as the gospel the other apostles preach and in v4-8 he shows that the apostles were all eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. He includes the reference to 500 brothers and sisters to show that Christ didn’t just secretly appear to the Apostles, he also publicly appeared to others who can verify what he is saying.
- ***Why does Paul describe himself as ‘one abnormally born’?***
  - This is a very strong phrase meaning something like ‘an aborted foetus.’ Why then does Paul describe himself in such gruesome terms? Thiselton helpfully suggests it implies three things about Paul;
    - The metaphor shows how unlikely Paul was. Just you would never expect an aborted foetus to live, so you would never expect Paul the persecutor to become a Christian, let alone an apostle. It shows how miraculous Paul’s conversion was.
    - The term gives the sense of one who is ugly, misshapen and ill equipped for life and yet God in his grace and power made Paul an apostle.
    - It also conveys the sense of contrast between Paul and the twelve. The twelve had enjoyed the benefit of the full three year apprenticeship period with Jesus before being commissioned as Apostles. In contrast Paul was thrust into the role of an Apostle without the gestation period that the others had benefited from.
  - The big thing through this is that it emphasises God’s sovereign and miraculous grace that he had shown to take Saul the persecutor and turn him into Paul the apostle. This is exactly where Paul wants the focus to be in v10.
- ***“Is Paul boasting when he says he worked harder than the rest of the Apostles?”***
  - In short, no! He makes it very clear that it was the grace of God working with/in him. Paul isn’t boasting as if this is a competition. I think the point he is making is that he worked harder for Christ because he was so aware of just how incredibly gracious Christ had been to him in saving him and making him an apostle.

## **Big Idea Treasure the resurrection by seeing what we lose when we let go of the resurrection.**

### **Applications**

- **Have greater confidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead**
  - This is Paul's big aim in v1-11. He reminds them of the gospel and the evidence for the resurrection so that they would continue to stand firm in believing the gospel.
  - These verses are for Christians not just people exploring Christianity. As Christians we need to be reminded that Jesus really did die on the cross for our sins and he really did rise from the dead. We live our lives surrounded by people who either believe or assume that the gospel isn't true. It is good therefore to remind ourselves of the solid ground for our faith.
- **Give thanks for what we have and what we can look forward to because Christ rose from the dead.**
  - In v12-19 Paul spells out the implications if Christ did not rise from the dead;
    - The Apostles preaching is useless (v14)
    - Our faith is useless (v15 and v17)
    - Christians are liars and false witnesses about God (v15)
    - We are still in our sins and under God's judgment (v17)
    - Christians who have died are lost, death is the end (v18)
    - Christians should be pitied because our hope is really hopeless (v19)
  - Yet because Christ has been raised from the dead we can turn these around as positives. So because Christ did rise from the dead;
    - Preaching the gospel is not a waste of time, it's vital.
    - Faith in Jesus is precious and essential.
    - Christians are telling the truth about God, in a world where there are so many competing claims about God.
    - Our sins have been forgiven.
    - Christians who have died are safe with Christ, they are asleep and he will raise them to new life.
    - Christians are not to be pitied and looked down upon. Instead Christians are to have compassion and pity for those who have not put their hope in Christ.

## Questions

### **Starter - Some people in Corinth were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead (v12.) Where do we encounter similar thinking today?**

To help your group get into the passage and see the implications of the passage I suggest that you use give them each a copy of the table that is on the website (it is imaginatively called '1 Corinthians 15v1-19 table'.) Everyone can then fill the table in as you go. This gives you the flexibility to break up into smaller groups or to stay as one group.

Start by getting the group to pick out the implications if Christ has not been raised from the dead. Paul gives us these in v12-19. You might need to tease out what some of them mean for your group. For example if Christ has not been raised from the dead then it's not just preaching that's useless, all Christian service is useless!

Once you have seen explored the implications if Christ has not been raised from the dead we then need to see why we can be confident that he has been raised from the dead (this question is printed below the table.) To answer this question the group will need to dig into v1-11. There are many things that we could pick out from these verses that give us greater confidence in the resurrection. There are two main things that we need to draw out. First, Jesus' death and resurrection happened 'according to the scriptures' (v4&5). Second Christ appeared to so many different people on different occasions and in different places. Just look how many times the word 'appeared' is used in v5-8.

Now that we can be certain that Jesus has been raised from the dead we can fill in the second part of the table. This involves taking v12-19 and turning them into positives (see the application section above.) Don't just get the group to fill in the table. Use this as an opportunity to talk about how this helps and encourages us. For example, many of us often feel weary in Christian service, how does the resurrection encourage us to keep going? Or what about those of us who are struggling with guilt? How does the resurrection help those who are feeling weighed down by guilt? Or what about those who are grieving the loss of a Christian loved one? How does the resurrection help them? At this point you can be flexible and let the discussion be shaped by the people in your group and their situations. Just make sure that you keep the focus on taking to hear the implications of the resurrection!

It would be good to leave plenty of time to pray and thank God for the resurrection and the confidence we can have. You can pray too for one another to take to hear the implications of the resurrection in the different areas of life that you have spoken about.

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

	If Christ <i>has not</i> been raised then...	Jesus <i>has</i> been raised so...
Preaching the gospel and any Christian service		
Sin and Judgment		
Faith		
Death		

Why can we be confident that Jesus was raised from the dead?

What has encouraged or helped you from this passage?

## Small Group Leaders Notes

### 1 Corinthians 15:20-34

#### Context

- “Otherwise, you have believed in vain...” (v1) —> “Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” (v58).
- The whole chapter sits between these two bookends. If the Corinthians hold to the apostolic message then their faith in Jesus is not in vain. Similarly because Christ has been raised from the dead then their service for Jesus is not in vain. The resurrection of Jesus gives faith and life meaning and purpose!
- “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?” (v12)
- In v1-11 Paul showed us the proof that Christ has been raised from the dead. We know that Christ rose because “he appeared” to so many people at so many different times.
- Then in v12-19 he has been showing us what we would lose if there is no resurrection from the dead as some in Corinth were saying.
- Now from v20 onwards Paul turns it round and shows us what we have as Christians because Christ has been risen. The ‘But’ at the beginning of v20 acts as a huge hinge.

#### Structure

- This passage falls into two natural sections (v20-28 and v29-34.) When we preach through 1 Corinthians we will follow this natural divide and cover the material in two sermons. For the sake of time we are covering the material in one Bible study.
- In v20-28 Paul positively asserts the implications that flow from the fact that “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead” (v20).
- Then in v29-34 Paul turns things around again and asks why Christians do what they do “if there is no resurrection from the dead.” Paul uses this technique to show up the inconsistency of what he and some of the Corinthians are doing if there is no resurrection from the dead. Similarly he shows that the sinful lifestyle of some of the Corinthians is inconsistent with the fact that Christ has risen.

#### Tricky Bits

- **“All will be made alive.” (v22)**
  - Taken out of context this could be saying that everyone will be raised to eternal life. This is what is known as universalism. At first this does seem to be what the verse is saying because of the contrast between all dying in Adam and all being made alive in Christ.
  - As always the key to understanding a verse is to read it in it’s context. The next verse makes it clear that Paul is focusing specifically on those who belong to Christ.
  - Whilst it is true that all will be raised for either judgment or eternal life, that is not Paul’s focus in these verses. Paul’s focus is solely on the eternal future of those who belong to Jesus.
- **“All his enemies under his feet” (v25-27)**
  - Who exactly are these enemies? They could be human enemies but from the reference to “All dominion, authority and power” Paul is including all spiritual forces that are opposed to Christ.

- In the ancient world the victor would use his defeated enemies as his footstool. This was to show his complete and utter victory and their total defeat and humiliation.
  - v26 in the NIV gives the impression that the defeat of death is all in the future. The greek gives the sense that this destruction of death has already begun with the resurrection of Jesus. It is ongoing now as people take their stand upon the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection and are rescued from death to life. Death will be completely destroyed and it's defeat will be seen perfectly when all who belong to Jesus are raised at his coming.
- ***“So that God may be all in all.” (v28)***
    - This phrase is used to give the sense that God will reign supreme over everything and there will be nothing left to challenge his rule. We see this described for us in Revelation 21.
  - ***“If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them?” (v29)***
    - This verse has the potential to sidetrack your study and lead to all sorts of unhelpful speculation. It could also lead to a discussion about Mormons and their practice of baptising the dead. STAY ON TRACK!
    - All the commentators will give you different ideas about exactly what was going on in Corinth and why people were doing this. The simple answer is that we don't know. In my opinion the best suggestion is that there were some believers who were dying before they had been baptised. Other believers were then getting baptised on behalf of the deceased as a way of reassuring grieving friends and family that the dead believer really did belong to Jesus. That's my best guess but as I say we don't know so there's little to be gained from speculating about it.
    - Again the context is important. We don't have to understand exactly what was going on to grasp the point that Paul is making in v29-32. Paul's argument goes like this, “If there is no resurrection from the dead... Then why do you do what you do? (Baptise for the dead) ... And why do I do what I do? (Endanger myself every hour for you?)” Paul's point is that what they are doing and what he is doing is pointless IF Christ hasn't been raised. Here's the mainline through these verses so STAY ON TRACK.
    - Paul doesn't advocate baptism for the dead. He doesn't say that this is something Christians should do, and there is no other mention of the practice in the rest of the Bible. Instead, Paul is using it as an example of something that makes no sense at all if, as some of the Corinthians are saying, there is no resurrection from the dead.
  - ***“If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus...” (v32)***
    - Again there is the potential for speculation. Paul could be speaking literally or metaphorically here, we don't know. Neither Acts nor Ephesians record Paul facing real wild animals but that doesn't mean that this didn't happen. Equally Paul could be speaking figuratively to describe the sort of human opposition he experienced in Ephesus. This would fit with 1 Corinthians 16:9, Acts 19:23-20:1 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. On balance therefore I would say he is speaking metaphorically but either way it doesn't change the main point Paul is making in these verses.

### **Big Idea**

- **Jesus' resurrection changes our lifestyle, our death and our future!**

### **Applications**

- **Comfort and hope for the grieving**



- Death is being defeated but it is not yet fully and finally defeated. Death is still a painful reality for us. As someone said to me recently, “The older I get the more funerals I attend.” Now we groan and we grieve.
  - The world around us doesn’t believe in the resurrection and so tells us to think less and enjoy life more. The world has got nothing it can offer at the graveside except a few nice platitudes about the person who has died.
  - As Christians we have Jesus, the first fruits! Where he has gone, his people will follow. As he is, so we will be. He has gone through death and he will bring us through too. His resurrection means that death for believers is now described as like being asleep. We will be raised!
  - Now we are sad, we grieve, we mourn and that is right. But our grief is reshaped by the resurrection. These verses show us where history has come from and where it is going. It has come from a day when there was one empty grave and it is going to a day when every grave will be empty!
  - Take the time to dwell on this, to talk about it. There will be those in our groups who have lost loved ones recently. Let’s gently and lovingly encourage one another with these words.
- **Confidence for the future in the face of evil and opposition**
    - At present we don’t see everything under Jesus’ feet. The world can seem chaotic and the news is full of evil and suffering that can leave us feeling depressed. As Christians we are not immune from such things and it can drag us down and leave us struggling to have any joy.
    - Against such a backdrop v24-28 are great verses to meditate upon because they show us the certainty of where history is heading. Things won’t go on like this forever. One day every enemy will be destroyed and all will be right with the world under God’s loving rule. Again let’s encourage one another with these words.
- **Perspective for the present as we decide how to live**
    - v29-34 raise the question of why do you do what you do? If Jesus has risen then why do we live the way we do?
    - If Jesus hasn’t been risen then risk, cost and sacrifice for Jesus are utterly pointless. But by implication because Jesus has been raised then taking risks and making costly sacrifices for Jesus are worth it! Remember where this chapter is going - v58, “your labour in the Lord is not in vain!” Every risk we take and every costly sacrifice we make for Jesus is worth it because we serve the one who has been raised from the dead.
    - All this raises the question, “Do our lifestyles reflect our belief in the resurrection?” As western Christians we love comfort and we are generally quite risk averse. Is this compatible with our belief in the resurrection? Doesn’t our desire for comfort and ease suggest that actually we believe that there is no resurrection from the dead and that all that really matters is the here and now? Does my lifestyle and my priorities reflect my beliefs that I profess?
    - Along similar lines we see that holiness is not in vain. If there’s no resurrection then you might as well live however you like (v32b.) But Christ has been bodily raised and all those who belong to him will also be raised bodily so what we do with our bodies matters. This ties in with the theme of the use of the bodies back in 6:12-20. Our bodies have a future so what we do with them matters.

## Questions

**Starter - If someone believes that it is going to rain today, what will they take with them when they leave the house?**

**In a similar way, if someone believes that Jesus rose from the dead, how do you think this will shape their lifestyle and priorities?**

*This question is designed to set up the big idea that Jesus' resurrection should change our outlook, hopes and priorities. This is where we are aiming to get to in this study and so this starter question will help us head in the right direction.*

**§1 In v21-23 Paul describes Jesus as the first fruits**

- **What does this image convey?**
- **Why is this such good news for Christians?**
- **How does this shape our outlook on death?**

*The first fruits that appear on a tree promise that there is more fruit to come. In the same way Jesus' resurrection promises the resurrection of everyone who belongs to him. Where he has gone we will follow. This is great news for Christians because it means that we can be certain that we will be raised to life. On Easter Sunday one grave was empty. When Christ comes all the graves of his people will be empty!*

*This should give us a very different outlook on life and death to everyone else. Death is the last and in some ways the greatest enemy we face (v26.) Christ has conquered and yet we still suffer and die. Yet because of Jesus' resurrection we know that the best is yet to come for Jesus' people! Death is not the door to oblivion, instead it's the door to life!*

**§2 Read v24-28. What is Jesus doing now?**

- **What will happen in the future?**
- **How does this change the way that we view the world?**

*Jesus is reigning as the King. His resurrection and ascension didn't mark the start of his retirement. The risen and ascended Christ is now ruling in power over all things and all his enemies, even death are being put under his feet. This means that the world and history are not random. They are heading towards the day when everything will be subject to Christ and nothing will challenge his rule.*

*This means that whilst this world is still full of sadness and brokenness we need not despair. King Jesus hasn't lost control. Instead he's bringing everything under his rule and one day that process will be complete and even death itself will be destroyed. So whilst we are grieved and saddened by the state of the world we should not lose heart.*

**§3 In v29-32 Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions. What big point is he making?**

- **If someone doesn't believe that Jesus has risen then what sort of lifestyle and priorities would you expect them to have?**
- **If someone does believe that Jesus has risen what sort of lifestyle and priorities would you expect them to have?**
- **Do you think our lives tell other people that we believe in the resurrection?**
- **What changes would show people that you really do believe in the resurrection?**

*Here's where our study has been heading. As I said before don't get bogged down in things like baptism for the dead. The big point of Paul's questions is that the things that he and others are doing make no sense if Jesus hasn't been raised. If Christ hasn't been raised then it makes no sense for Paul to risk his life spreading the gospel. BUT Christ has been raised and so a life of discomfort, risk and sacrifice for Christ is not in vain. Similarly a life of holiness matters because our bodies will have a future.*

*In Corinth there were people in the church who openly didn't believe in the resurrection. Most people in our society don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus and you can see that in how they live their life. In many ways our society can be summed up by the quote from Isaiah 22:13. Surely as Christians who believe that Jesus has risen our lifestyles should look radically different to everyone else around us? Yet so often our lifestyles and priorities for ourselves and our families look like everyone else. We say we believe Jesus has risen but our lives don't back that up.*

Take some time to think about your own priorities. Why do you live the way that you do? What does it say about your beliefs? You aren't going to fight wild beasts in Ephesus but what might it look like for you?

## Small Group Leaders Notes

### 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

*If time allows you can split this passage into two studies; 15:35-49 and 15:50-58.*

#### **Context**

- There are some people in the Corinthian church who are saying that there is no physical resurrection from the dead (v12.)
  - In answer to this Paul has laid out a careful rebuttal;
    - 1st He demonstrated that Christ was raised from the dead (v1-11).
    - 2nd He showed the terrible consequences for Christians if Christ has not been raised from the dead (v12-19 and v29-34).
    - 3rd He showed that because Christ has been raised from the dead then Christians also will be raised from the red (v20-28).
- Now in v35, Paul anticipates a follow up question from those who scoff at the idea of a physical resurrection from the dead;
  - In v35-49 Paul answers the question of ‘How will the dead be raised?’ This is a common question still today amongst Christians. “What kind of bodies will we have?” “How old will we be?” Will we be able to recognise one another?” These sorts of questions have always fascinated Christians and Paul helps us see some general principles by looking at nature and by looking at the risen Christ.
  - Then in v50-57 Paul answers the question of when the dead will be raised?
  - Finally in v58 Paul answers the question of ‘So What?’ This verse is the climax of the whole chapters and ties together the whole chapter (notice the similarities and repeated words and phrases found in v1-2 and v58.)

#### **Notes**

##### **“How are the dead raised?” (v35-49)**

- Paul answers this question by learning some lessons from nature (v36-44) and then by learning some lessons from the risen Christ (v45-49).
- **Look at Nature (v36-44)**
  - Lesson 1 - New Life comes from Death (v36)
    - Unless the seed is planted in the ground and dies it will not produce the new life. If you don’t plant the carrot seeds but instead leave them in the packet then you won’t get the carrots. The same principle applies with our resurrection bodies. Death is necessary for the transformed resurrection bodies that God has prepared for us.
  - Lesson 2 - The New is different from the old (v37)
    - Again think of carrot seeds. The seeds that go into the ground look nothing like the carrots that come out. You don’t plant mini carrots and get bigger carrots out. A dramatic transformation takes places. Just looking at the seeds before they are planted you would not be able to guess what they will produce. Again so it is with our resurrection bodies. The resurrection will involve a similarly radical transformation/change. Paul will tell us more about this change in v42-49.

- Lesson 3 - God creates all sorts of different bodies to suit their different environments and purposes (v38-41)
  - At the risk of understatement, God knows what he's doing. Look around at his creation and we can see that he creates all sorts of different 'bodies' for different things. His creation is full of diverse bodies that are all just right for their particular environment. For example fish have scales, fins and gills to help them swim and breathe under water whereas birds have feathers and wings to help them fly.
  - God knows what he's doing. He is perfectly capable of creating different bodies that are just right for what we need. He has given us one type of body now that is appropriate for this creation and he will give us new different bodies that will be perfectly appropriate for the new creation.
  - Have a look at v42-44 and fill in the table below;

	Now our bodies are...	Then our bodies will be...
v42		
v43		
v44		

- **Look at Christ (v44-49)**

- The theme of contrast continues in these verses as Paul compares Adam and Christ (we were introduced to this contrast in v21-22.) Just as we now all have bodies like Adam, so Christians will all have bodies like Christ.
- Again fill in the table to see the contrast between Adam and Christ;

	Adam / Us now	Christ / Us then
v45		
v47		
v48-49		

- We will tackle some of the details of these verses in the Tricky Bits section below. For now the important point to see is that the resurrection body of Jesus gives us some clues as to what our resurrection bodies will be like. If you have time you could re-read Luke 24 and John 20 and notice the similarities and differences between Jesus' pre-resurrection and post-resurrection bodies.

- **“When will the dead be raised?” (v50-57)**

- The focus shifts now to Christ's return (see back to v23-24 for parallel verses.) Whether we have died before Christ's coming or are still alive at that point we must be transformed because the perishable (our current bodies) cannot inherit the imperishable (new creation.) All Christ's people will therefore be changed when Christ

returns and the dead are raised. On that day we will have an imperishable and immortal body fit for our new imperishable home where immortality reigns.

- On that day finally the last great enemy of death will be defeated once and for all (v54-55 and v26.)
- As Christians we don't need to fear death because Christ has already taken the sting of death (judgment for sin) for us. We may die but in Christ we will not experience the sting of death.

### **“So What?” (v58)**

- This verse is the climax of the whole chapter. Paul has been building up to this from v1-2. They had taken their stand on the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection (v1) but they were being encouraged to move away from this. Paul had told them that to move away from the resurrection would mean they had believed in vain (v2.) He now uses similar language again at the end of the chapter. After all we've seen in this chapter he urges us to stand firm on the gospel and not move away from any aspect of it (especially the resurrection.) Even if people scoff or sneer at us we must stay where we are. The reason we should be unmoved is that because Christ has risen our labour for him is never in vain.
- When we hear the phrase 'labour in the Lord' we might immediately think of evangelism, missionary work, preaching or some other particular ministry that we might be involved in. Labour in the Lord certainly does include these things but I don't think it just means these things. Anything that we do in obedience to Jesus counts as labour in the Lord.
- So as we seek to be a godly employee at work that's labour in the Lord. Similarly as we strive to be a faithful loving spouse we're labouring in the Lord. As parents strive to bring their kids up in the faith, or children care for their elderly parents or teenagers submit to their parents because of Christ this is all labour in the Lord if we're motivated by wanting to please him. As we seek to serve Christ wholeheartedly in any sphere of life we're labouring in the Lord and, no matter how it feels, this is not in vain because Christ is risen.

### **Tricky Bits**

- ***What is meant by a spiritual body?***
  - At first it might sound like we will be ghosts floating around as spirits. That is not what Paul means. This is obvious from v45 where it says that the last Adam (Christ) was a life giving spirit. This is not denying Jesus had a real physical body, instead the point is to draw a contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam.
  - The word 'spiritual' is the equivalent of supernatural. Christ's resurrection body was supernatural in that he could suddenly appear in a room even though the doors were locked (John 20:19.) Now we have natural bodies for a natural world. Then we will have supernatural bodies for a supernatural new creation.
  - So don't let the word 'spiritual' trip you up. Paul's making the same point about transformation that he's made throughout these verses.

**Big Idea - When Jesus returns he will give us transformed bodies like his resurrection body that are perfectly suited for our new home with him.**

### **Applications**

**§1 Don't worry and speculate about exactly what it will be like, God's got it under control.**

- 1 Corinthians 15 does not answer all our questions about what our bodies will be like. That's not what it's meant to do. Paul isn't wanting to satisfy our curiosity, he's wanting to help us stand firm and give ourselves fully to serving Jesus (v1-2 and v58.)
- So don't spend ages endlessly speculating about what it may or may not be like. Take on board what we are told and then trust God that he knows what he's doing. God is an expert at making sure that everything has just the right sort of body for it's environment (v38-41) so we can be confident that he will get things right. He's raised Christ so we can look at Christ's resurrection body as a demonstration model of what we have to look forward to.

## **§2 Don't be afraid of grey hairs!**

- Sam Allberry has written a wonderful book on the resurrection called 'Lifted' (<https://www.10ofthose.com/products/2300/lifted>). He writes;

*"This is the major difference between Christian hope and any other kind. Our Western society cannot bear to think about death. The only hope it can find is a form that hides away all forms and reminders of death. But true hope is not found in hiding from death, but in being able to come to terms with its reality. For Christians, death is not the end, but a new beginning. It is the condition for resurrection.*

*One Christian lady in her mid-fifties told me recently that this is why she doesn't bother to dye her hair. She said she doesn't mind the process of ageing affecting her appearance. Her perspective has been shaped by resurrection hope. The best is not behind her; it is to come. The body I have and am - this body now - is not ultimate. Even at its peak it doesn't come close to the body I will have. Grey hairs are therefore not a threat but a promise. The gradual slowing down of the body, the processes of physical ageing and decay that anticipate our final passing, these are not (to borrow a phrase) the beginning of the end, but just the end of the beginning. Better is to come - much better! Death is the transition to resurrection."*

- It is good to be honest with one another about our fears and frustrations as our bodies age and deteriorate. Yet as we share these fears and frustrations we can also remind one another of the hope we have. It is not all downhill from here! My best days are not behind me they are still ahead of me! Old age is not the beginning of the end, it's just the end of the beginning!
- If you are covering this passage over two studies then make sure you give plenty of time to talking about this in one or both of the studies.

## **§3 Serve Jesus wholeheartedly because it's not a waste!**

- This is the big application of the passage and the whole chapter. We've already touched on this above but make sure you give plenty of time to this.
- Take the time to help people identify the different things that can count as labour for the Lord. Remember that it's about our motivation to serve Jesus in the task that we do. For example parenting can be labour in the Lord if it's done for Jesus and his glory, but it can also just be labour if we're not doing it as servants of Christ.
- Take the time to talk about the ways that our labours can feel futile and pointless but then make sure you spend time encouraging one another to keep going in light of the resurrection. The key, therefore, is to connect the theology of what we've been learning with the practicalities of our daily lives.

## Questions

**Starter - When you think about heaven and your future body, what questions do you have?**

*As always the aim is to get people talking without making them feel like they must give the 'right' answer. You can't promise to answer all the questions that people ask but this passage will help us to have a better idea of our future bodies.*

*You can then explain that these verses tell us that we can learn some things about our future bodies by looking at nature (v35-44) and then by looking at the risen Christ (v44-49.)*

**§1 What has to happen to a seed for it to produce new life? What is the implication for us? (v36)**

*Seeds have to die/be buried in order to produce new life. If they stay in the packet they won't produce the goods. In the same way we're being told that our old bodies need to die if we're to experience the benefits of resurrection bodies.*

**§2 What do v37-41 tell us about God and our resurrection bodies?**

*God has created all sorts of different bodies for all sorts of different environments. His creation is full of diversity. He is more than capable of giving us just the right kind of body for the new creation. So even if we don't fully understand what it will be like, we can trust God that he has got everything in hand.*

**§3 Have a look at v42-44. What are our bodies like now? How will our resurrection bodies be different?**

*You could get the group to fill in the blank table that was included in the notes. Think about what it means that our bodies now are perishable, dishonourable, weak and natural. How do we see and experience these things in daily life? (Note - I think that dishonour is referring to how we often use our bodies for sin.)*

*In contrast our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual/supernatural. It's hard to imagine just what that will be like (though Jesus' resurrection body in the gospels gives us some clues.) Encourage the group to dwell on just how wonderful a transformation this will be. All the fears and frustrations that we have about our bodies now will be no more!*

**§4 v44-49. In what ways are we like Adam now? How will we be like Jesus?**

*These verses continue the theme of contrasting the present with the future. Now we bear the image of Adam with our natural bodies that have come from the earth and will return to the earth. But wonderfully we will be transformed into the perfect image of Christ with spiritual bodies born of heaven not earth.*

### **Application Questions for v35-49**

**§5 A Christian has written that "grey hairs are not a threat, they are a promise." Why do grey hairs and ageing often feel like a threat?**

*Let's be honest with ourselves. As Christians we often do fear ill health, declining physical and mental capabilities as much as those who aren't Christians. We can be just as obsessed with sustaining the appearance of youth as everyone else. We too can often feel like our best days are behind us.*



### **How does our Christian hope help to change how we view ageing?**

*That Christian writer is onto something aren't they? We've already been told that death is necessary to bring new life (v36) and so when we see signs of ageing we can view them not as threatening but as a promise that our future resurrection body is coming nearer and nearer. That doesn't mean that declining health and faculties is not hard and painful. There is real frustration and groaning in this life but we have a real hope that no one else has. The best everyone else can do is try and ignore the signs or stretch out this life as long as possible because they believe that this life is as good as it gets. We can look forward and know that however fit and well we are now the best is yet to come.*

### **What will it mean for you to embrace ageing as a promise not a threat?**

*It might be a good idea to split into pairs for this question to encourage honest discussion. We're asking people to be honest about their fears and how these verses can transform those fears. For some it will be grey hairs and wrinkles, for other it will be the threat of Alzheimer's, or the need for surgery or tests etc.*

### **Questions for v50-58**

*If you are doing these verses as a second study then you will need to think of a starter question that helps people to begin to think about serving Christ.*

### **§6 How will we be changed when Jesus comes?**

*This picks up what we have seen in v42-49 so you may not need to spend too much time on this question. The big thing to notice is that we will all be changed instantly. We will all be given imperishable and immortal bodies that will be fit for our new home. Notice again how our bodies must be suitable for the environment in which we will live (v39-41.)*

### **§7 Why can we say that death has lost its sting? (What are we not saying?)**

*We're not saying that death is nothing. We're not saying that dying won't be painful or unpleasant. We're not saying dying itself is a good thing. What we are saying is that the worst part of death has been removed for Christians because the worst part of death is judgment for sin. Christ has taken the judgment for our sin and so there is no sting left for us to experience when we die. Thanks be to God!*

### **Application Questions for v58**

### **§8 Labour in the Lord is anything that we do for Jesus, however ordinary or mundane it may feel. In what ways do you labour for the Lord?**

*Again you might like to break into smaller groups. There will be all sorts of different answers that people can give to this question depending on their age and stage of life. We all have different things that God gives us to do, the important thing is to help everyone see that whoever they are there is labour that God calls them to be doing.*

### **In what ways can this work sometimes feel pointless?**

*All work can feel frustrating and in vain at times. Preaching, serving, evangelising, discipling, parenting, caring for elderly parents, housework can all at times feel pointless.*

### **How will these verses encourage you to keep serving Jesus in what you do?**

*Because we're serving the one who has risen from the dead then everything we do for him is not in vain, even if it feels like it. We have a wonderful future to look forward to beyond death in the new creation with Christ so as we serve with that perspective and labour for our resurrected Lord we're not striving in vain!*