

International Bible Lessons Commentary

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 20-22

English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, April 5, 2015

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 5, 2015**, is from **1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 20-22**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses the questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 20-22

(1 Corinthians 15:1) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,

One reason we continue to study the Bible is to remind ourselves of what God has taught and how best to apply His Word in our daily decisions. Paul wrote a summary of the good news in regard to Jesus Christ and what Christ did for us. Paul proclaimed and recorded an early statement of facts that he had learned regarding Christ's resurrection appearances to those other than himself. The Christians in Corinth had previously received these facts, and they stood in faith as individuals and as a church upon these facts. We may stand on a ladder to do something important, and the ladder makes it possible for us to achieve our task. Christians stand on the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and their stand gives them eternal life and the ability to live full and meaningful lives for God on earth in service to Christ.

(1 Corinthians 15:2) and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

The facts about Jesus' resurrection from the dead were not recorded to create an interesting history book, though Christ's resurrection truly happened in history. The facts about Jesus' resurrection from the dead are proclaimed to save people's lives. The facts are a message of good news to keep in our minds and hold in our hearts to save us from sinning, from the power of the devil, from being deceived by the world and our desires, and from the eternal punishment that we deserve for our sins. When we receive

the facts of Jesus' resurrection as good news for the way we live, Christ will bring all of these blessings to us, unless what we say we believe is actually meaningless to us and has no impact upon how we make daily decisions or build our lives.

(1 Corinthians 15:3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

Paul did not create the gospel or good news. Paul reported facts that he experienced; in addition, Paul reported facts that he had heard from eyewitnesses who also met the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Of first or of most importance for us personally is what Christ did for us (as well as for the world): Christ died for our sins. Christ came to save us from our sins, and Paul reported that Christ achieved His goal when He died for our sins. Christ did not die accidentally. Christ was not surprised by people's rejection of Him or by His arrest and crucifixion. His death and resurrection were planned by His Father and by Him before Christ was born. Through the prophets and other writers of the Old Testament, They revealed their plan to the world before Christ came into the world; therefore, Christ's death was "in accordance with the Scriptures."

(1 Corinthians 15:4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Verse 4 continues to teach what Paul wrote as "of first importance." Christ fulfilled what God had inspired the prophets and other writers of the Old Testament to record hundreds of years before Jesus Christ came to earth. More than anything else, Jesus Christ came into the world in order to die, to be buried, and to be raised from the dead for us because of our sins. Even if we begin to obey the teachings of Christ the moment we learn of them, Christ needed to die an atoning and sacrificial death for us because we have committed sins in the past and we will sin in the future if we are overcome by temptations. These facts of Christ's coming are in accordance with the prior revelation of God in the Bible. His accomplishments according to the Scriptures are good reasons to believe the Bible is the true word of the true God.

(1 Corinthians 15:5) and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The list of the appearances of Christ that Paul received and passed on to others might not have included everyone or Paul might have shortened the list when he wrote his letter. Paul did not include how or when Jesus appeared to those on the list, which would have greatly lengthened his letter. Greater details about Christ's resurrection and the names of more people who saw the risen Lord are described in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles of the New Testament. Jesus changed Cephas' name to Peter, so he was known by both names. Cephas may have been mentioned first, because Peter was the first to openly acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of the living God, then Jesus foretold that He would build His church upon Peter's confession of faith (Matthew 16:13-20). "The twelve" was a shorthand way of saying "Jesus' disciples;" for

of the original twelve, Judas had hanged himself, and he was replaced by Matthias, who had also witnessed the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:12-26).

(1 Corinthians 15:6) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Paul's list was probably a brief summary that was not intended to be strictly chronological. It may have been an abbreviated list of some of Jesus' most important appearances. We do not learn from the New Testament when Jesus appeared to more than 500 Christians at one time—perhaps this occurred the day of His ascension into heaven (because the list is not chronological, but in order of importance to Paul and some in the early church). The point is to show that Jesus did not appear to just a few people or to only a few people at a time; rather, a multitude of people saw Jesus and most were still alive to recount the event in greater detail if asked. The Bible does not tell us everything that we would like to know or answer all of our questions.

(1 Corinthians 15:7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

James, the brother of Jesus, became a believer in and follower of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God after Jesus rose from the dead. As Jesus' brother, James verified that the resurrected Lord Jesus was indeed Jesus and not an imposter or a hoax perpetrated of the disciples. James became a leader in the church. James decided and declared that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles should not be required to obey the ceremonial laws of the Jews in order to be saved or become a part of the church (Acts 15:12-21). Jesus also appeared to and gave instructions to all of the apostles; which would have included more than the original twelve disciples.

(1 Corinthians 15:8) Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Last of all meant last of all on the list of appearances that Paul included in his letter; not that Jesus never appeared to anyone else after he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul listed himself last because of his humility and sense of unworthiness as inspired by the Holy Spirit. He was untimely born because he had not been a disciple of Jesus from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, even as James, the brother of Jesus, had not been a disciple of Jesus until after God raised Jesus from the dead and convinced him that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul did emphasize that Jesus had actually appeared to him, and he was not an apostle because a person or group had appointed him an apostle. Paul was an apostle only because Jesus Christ had appeared to him and commissioned him to serve Him as an apostle (Galatians 1:1).

(1 Corinthians 15:9) For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul knew that he did not deserve nor had he earned the right to be an apostle. He reported his conversion and call in the greater detail when he defended his apostleship in his Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 1:11-24). Luke wrote that Paul had ravaged the church and Paul witnessed and approved of the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Jesus appeared to Paul before his conversion and asked Paul why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:1-22).

(1 Corinthians 15:10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Paul became an apostle only by the grace and call of God. The early church approved of Paul's apostleship after Barnabas spoke with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Paul's defense (Acts 9:26-31). The first Apostles were those who had seen the Lord Jesus throughout His ministry and witnessed His resurrection; later, the church appointed apostles after careful examination, but they had to be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection who could be confirmed by Jesus' first disciples, who were eyewitnesses of His ministry. Paul wrote that it was not a futile or meaningless effort on Jesus' part to extend His grace to Paul and make Paul an apostle. Rather, in appreciation and love for Christ, Paul worked hard and it was the grace of God in him that empowered and motivated him to work harder than others. Paul humbly said the grace of God had worked through him.

(1 Corinthians 15:11) Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

All of the apostles proclaimed the same message and their message was consistent with the Scriptures. Christ died in accordance with the Scriptures and He was buried and raised from the dead on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Many witnesses confirmed this fact and proved the fulfillment of and reliability of the Scriptures. Paul proclaimed these facts; the Christians in Corinth believed these facts and stood on these facts. They were being saved by Christ according to these facts and by believing in Christ according to the Scriptures; therefore, they should hold firm to these facts rather than believe in vain or without the application of these facts in their daily lives and decisions.

(1 Corinthians 15:20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

No doubt some people did not believe the bodily resurrection of the dead was possible or desirable. Many Greeks theorized that the physical human body was evil because it was material, and it would be best if death meant a person escaped their physical body that enslaved their spirit. Paul insisted on the fact that Christ had been raised from the dead, and Christ was the first of many who would be raised from the dead. Previously, people such as Lazarus had been resuscitated and would die again. Those resurrected from the dead would never die again.

(1 Corinthians 15:21) For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

When Adam, a human being, committed sin, death came into the world for everyone as punishment and to prevent sinners from becoming increasingly evil on earth forever. Jesus rose from the dead, a human being, to save believers in Him from their sins and to enable them to live in increasing holiness forever in a raised and glorified human body similar to His.

(1 Corinthians 15:22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Jesus said that when He returned He would separate the sheep (His faithful followers) from the goats (those determined to live unrepentant rebellious lives against God). See Matthew 25:31-46. Until Jesus Christ returns, everyone will die a physical death. A holy and joyful eternal life is possible for all who trust in Christ, but eternal punishment is reserved for those who reject Christ and His followers (Matthew 25:31-46; see also Revelation 20:11-15). Because Christ rose from the dead, everyone will rise from the dead; however, two different groups of resurrected people will be separated from one another for eternity. Jesus' resurrection answered in human history whether or not people will live after they die: the question that remains is where an individual person will live after their resurrection. If we truly believe the good news of the gospel and stand on the good news as Paul described in the Bible, we can live with God and God's people forever (for believers are "being saved"—1 Corinthians 15:2).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Describe two reasons that Paul gives for believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. What does Christ's death mean and mean to you?
3. What does Christ's resurrection mean and mean to you?
4. After the good news is proclaimed, what does a true believer do? What is the result?
5. Besides himself, who does Paul list by name of those who saw the risen Lord? Why do you think he names them by name?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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