

Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of them that slept.

I Corinthians 15:20

But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.

He was not the first raised from the dead, but the first raised who never died again. Everyone who has been raised from the dead, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has died again and remains in the grave until Christ returns. He is the firstfruits because he was the first but not the last to be raised eternally.

The words “raise,” “risen,” “raised,” and “rise” are all one Greek word *egeiro* that is used nineteen times in I Corinthians 15. *Egeiro* and *anastasis* (resurrection) are used to describe the same thing: the eternal resurrection from the dead, first of Christ, then those who are his at his coming. Note how *egeiro* and *anastasis* are used interchangeably in verse 12.

I Corinthians 15:12

Now if Christ be preached that he rose [*egeiro*] from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection [*anastasis*] of the dead?

Whether the scripture says Christ rose from the dead or was resurrected, the truth is identical. He got up and has and will stay up forever.

In I Corinthians 15:20 the dead are referred to as “them that slept,” as is true in I Thessalonians.

I Thessalonians 4:13

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Sleep is a natural, temporary, and periodical state of diminished activity of body and mind. In the state of sleep there is a suspension of consciousness, sensation, and thought which results in rest.

Death is referred to as sleep because it is also a temporary state. In this state all consciousness and activity are completely suspended. There is no remembrance (Psalms 6:5); all thoughts perish (Psalms 146:4); no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom is in the grave (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Also one has no realization of time. Therefore, a person's last thought in his awareness before death is followed immediately by his first thought in the resurrection in the face of Jesus Christ. Thousands of years may have passed in actual time between a person's last thought before death and his first thought after being made alive; but to that person it will seem as a moment in time because his consciousness was totally suspended in death.

Most Christians think that upon death those who had believed in Christ are immediately received up into heaven. However, this belief is not substantiated by scripture and causes much wrong thinking and actions. The Bible clearly teaches the dead remain in the grave until the return of Christ. If the dead were alive now, why would Christ have to return to gather his people? What would be the reason for a resurrection if the dead were already alive? The dead remain in the grave which is one reason we long for the return of Christ. As we continue to study I Corinthians 15, we will learn exactly what happens to those who are dead when Christ returns. Now they sleep.

I Corinthians 15:21-23

For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

All mankind is associated with Adam because he is the head of the human race. As his descendants we all inherit sin and death. Those who are associated with Christ inherit righteousness and eternal life. Verses 21 and 22 summarize what is detailed in Romans 5:12-21.

Verse 21 tells us by Adam came death; by Jesus Christ the resurrection of the dead. Verse 22 tells us in Adam all die; in Christ all shall be made alive. The parallelism of these two verses shows us the

resurrection is how all are made alive. Verse 23 tells us who the "all" to be made alive are — "they that are Christ's at his coming."

When Jesus Christ returns, all the dead who are Christ's will be resurrected. Those who partake in this are called "the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36). This resurrection is called "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5 and 6), "the better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35), the resurrection "to everlasting life" (Daniel 12:2, John 5:29), "the resurrection of the just" (Acts 24:15, Luke 14:14).

The Scriptures speak of another resurrection not mentioned in I Corinthians 15 called: "the resurrection of the unjust" (Acts 24:15), "the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29), resurrection "to shame *and* everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). This resurrection is for all who are not in the resurrection of the just. Revelation 20:5 refers to them as "the rest of the dead."

Three resurrections to acknowledge are: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the just (they that are Christ's), and the final resurrection of the unjust (all those who do not participate in the resurrection of the just).

The books of Daniel and Revelation speak of many things that will come to pass right before and after Christ's return. I Corinthians 15 rushes right to the end without elaborating because the chapter's discussion is the resurrection.

I Corinthians 15:24-28

Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death.

For he [God] hath put all things under his [Jesus Christ's] feet. But when he [God] saith all things are put under *him* [Jesus Christ], *it is* manifest that he [God] is excepted, which did put all things under him [Jesus Christ].

And when all things shall be subdued unto him [Jesus Christ], then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him [God] that put all things under him [Jesus Christ], that God may be all in all.

After stating what will happen at the end, the record comes back to the logical reasoning about the

resurrections. If death ended it all, then living a Christian life makes no sense, and from Paul's point of view, neither does continually risking his life. If, when we die, there is only death and no resurrection, let us pursue the Epicurean philosophy "eat and drink; for to morrow we die." This fatalist attitude is not ours for we know that we know Christ is coming back!

I Corinthians 15:29-32

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

This wrong understanding and communication about the resurrection had deceived believers in Corinth, as they still do today. God tells us that evil communications will corrupt us.

I Corinthians 15:33

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

The New English Bible has an interesting translation of this verse, "Make no mistake: bad company is the ruin of a good character!" Keeping company with those communicating evil about the resurrection will ruin our own good character. This disbelief in the resurrection is sharply reproofed because the basis of Christianity rests upon the resurrection of Christ. The born-again one's entire hope rests upon his resurrection and second coming.

I Corinthians 15:34

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame.

From this stern reproof, God launches into a discussion about what our resurrected bodies will be like. Some may ask, "How will the dead be brought back to life again? What kind of bodies will they have?" Apparently these questions are foolish!

I Corinthians 15:35 and 36

But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

*Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

When a grain of wheat is planted, it dies so the wheat plant may flourish; likewise with the dead at the resurrection.

Verses 36-38

...that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*:

But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

Another illustration is provided:

I Corinthians 15:40-44

*There are* also celestial [heavenly] bodies, and bodies terrestrial [earthly]: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another.

*There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory.

So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

It is sown in dishonour; 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

Note that the subject still being discussed is the resurrection. This new body is raised in incorruption, glory, and power. It is a spiritual body.

To be continued...