

Reading 1 Corinthians 15 with Ecclesiastes

Later this week, you will read 1 Corinthians 15, a wonderful chapter about Christ's resurrection. Through His resurrection, sin and death are defeated, and through our union with Him, not only are we raised spiritually now, we will also be raised bodily—yet, not for condemnation, but for vindication and eternal blessing! Much could be said about this glorious chapter, but I thought it might be helpful to see how it connects with the big picture story of Scripture. In particular, I want to look at how it connects with the book of Ecclesiastes. How does Ecclesiastes relate to 1 Corinthians 15? Among many connections, I will only mention three.

First, one of the most troubling things for the teacher in Ecclesiastes is the problem of *death*. Death seems to nullify the advantages of pursuing righteousness, among other things. All have to face it, yet no one is naturally comfortable with death. It is an ‘enemy’ and fallen man constantly lives under its shadow. In fact, living under the shadow of death tends to produce thinking like this (which sounds a lot like passages in Ecclesiastes [e.g., 2:24-26]):

What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (1 Cor 15:32)

Yet, thankfully, that is not the end of the story, for Christ has defeated sin and death through his death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Second, Ecclesiastes raises the issue of *vanity*. Is there any gain from our toil in this fallen world, or is it all in vain? First Corinthians gives us an answer to this dilemma:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor 15:58)

How is this possible? Surely, Christ has removed the ultimate shadow of death and the penalty of sin through His work—all of which contribute to this truth of our labor not being in vain. However, there is another verse in chapter 15 which speaks to this issue:

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. (1 Cor 15:10)

Paul is giving his own testimony to the work of God in his life. In doing so, he observes that God's grace toward him was not in vain. Putting this idea together with what we find later in the chapter, we can conclude the following: *our labor is not in vain because God's grace toward us (in light of Christ's resurrection) is not in vain*. In fact, we have the resurrection power of Christ at work in us (Eph 1:19-21)! In Christ, there is gain for our toil, because God is at work in us.

Third, the end of Ecclesiastes ironically highlights the fact that *all* things ultimately have meaning because all things will be subject to *judgment* (Eccl 12:13-14). Because of Christ's resurrection, we will bear His image, with a spiritual body like His—imperishable and immortal

(cf. 1 Cor 15:42-55). We will not suffer the penalty for our sins. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

May these truths encourage you during these uncertain times. God does not tell us to seek Him in vain (cf. Isa 45:19).

Keep reading!

Jason Hunt