

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

No Resurrection? No Life!

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 ¹² 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? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Last time we touched on the resurrection regarding both aspects of man's makeup, which is spirit and body, and how the entire man is resurrected in spirit and body, with the first resurrection being the spiritual resurrection from death to life in Christ.

Ephesians 2:5-7 ⁵ even when we were *dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),* ⁶ *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

But Paul's argument in this section of his letter is dealing primarily with the bodily resurrection of Christ and His people and how the acceptance of Christ's resurrection necessarily means that a physical resurrection must be extended to those who are in Him.

The irony here in this section is that Paul is addressing a group of believers who have placed their trust for the forgiveness of their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and yet some of them seem to deny the bodily resurrection of believers.

1 Corinthians 15:12 ¹² 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?

Part of the problem here may have something to do with the cultural and religious beliefs of many of these Christians, most of whom were from a Greek background

You see, many if not most of these believers in Corinth were Gentile converts who had all come out of pagan practices of worshipping false gods, along with the false teachings associated with their philosophical views on life.

Keep in mind that the Greeks and Romans of the ancient world were very religious people. They believed in many gods. And most of those ancient people had a world view which accepted the idea that after death there was a better place to go to. But it was a place free from the bondage of anything to do with humanity as we know it.

For these people the body was considered inherently evil while the spirit side of man was inherently good. And the objective was to be freed from this body, this tomb as many of their poets referred to it, and to fly free from the constraints of this world while joining the gods in their spirit world.

And so, the idea that we will one day be joined back to our physical bodies was an abhorrent thought, especially for the Greeks. In fact, you'll remember that Paul had an opportunity to share about the one true Creator God as he visited Athens. His opportunity came as a result of noticing how the Greeks had made an idol to an unknown god so that they would cover all their bases in the event they missed a god.

Paul then went on to explain who this unknown God is and began to explain how He can be known. And he ended with these words.

ACT 17:31-32 "For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." 32 ***When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered,*** but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Like many of these Athenians it appears that some of the Corinthians were teaching that to be reunited with our bodies after death was an abhorrent thought and should be rejected, and yet they had accepted that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead; probably thinking this was a unique case since He was the unique Savior.

The strange thing is that this was not a new teaching from Paul, and he most certainly taught about the resurrection when he was with them in Corinth. In fact, in his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul makes this teaching clear, and this letter to the Thessalonians

was written while he was in Corinth, pastoring if you will, this group of believers in Corinth.

1TH 4:13, 16-18 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words."

It would have made sense for Paul to have taught these Corinthians the very truths about which he was now writing the Thessalonians to encourage them. Can you see how all of this has got Paul concerned as he now writes the Corinthians, since this is a teaching which he delivered to them when he was with them?

But notice why he addresses this teaching of the resurrection to the Thessalonians. "Therefore encourage each other with these words."

I'm sure there were some in Corinth who continued to accept the resurrection of the believers and yet there were some who were teaching that once your body goes into the grave it will simply rot, return to the ground and your spirit will never be reunited to it.

Now you've got all sorts of confusion and concern in the ranks. And with all of the other divisions which were taking place in Corinth, now you've got division about your future state with the Lord.

Paul's solution to this problem is to once more teach these people the truth of the resurrection, but he does it in a most logical way.

1CO 15:13 "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."

The irony of this statement is that it contradicts some of what these Corinthians already believe. It's quite apparent that they have accepted the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and yet Paul comes along and says if you will not accept one part of this truth concerning the resurrection then you must logically reject every part.

What does he mean that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised?

Well, when Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead in our context he is addressing the resurrection of men in general as opposed to the resurrection of Christ specifically. And what he is saying is that if men are not resurrected then Christ could not be resurrected. Why?

Because Jesus Christ was as human as any other person on the planet. It is true that He is the Son of God, that He is the creator of the world, that He is none other than God Himself, but remember that our great God and Savior chose to take on flesh, to assume humanity, born of a virgin.

He continued to remain the Son of God but He also became the Son of man. He is fully God and fully man. So, why did Jesus have to be resurrected bodily from the dead? Why couldn't He be resurrected in some spiritual way only? To answer this we need to go back to the Garden of Eden.

On the sixth day man was created. He was then placed in the garden where God desired for man to be a person who would worship God forever in his present form, which is body, and spirit. Why would God give a perfect body to man only to take it away later, especially since man was created to live forever?

The point is that since man was created perfect with body, and spirit and was originally intended to love and serve God forever in that state, then it stands to reason that after sin entered into the world and death with it, that not even death will thwart God's original design of man which is body, and spirit.

And so, whether man believes in Christ or rejects Christ as Lord and Savior, he will ultimately spend eternity as a man; body, and spirit. This is exactly what our Lord Jesus teaches in the gospel of John.

JOH 5:28-29 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

The good and evil being spoken of here is not good deeds versus evil deeds to earn heaven, but good in that people believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the evil in people rejecting the only hope of salvation found in Christ.

This teaching of the resurrection of all men is mentioned in the Old Testament as well.

DAN 12:2 "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Men were created to love and serve God forever as men; body, and spirit. Unfortunately, men rejected God while body, and spirit, and thus were now separated from God forever.

The solution to our separation and our sin problem can only be found in a man who had no sin and could take the penalty for our sin by dying in our place and receiving the wrath of God for us.

That perfect man is the Son of God who took on body and spirit and died in our place, rose from the dead in body and spirit, thus reconciling us back to God if we would but believe and receive this free gift of eternal life in Christ.

Now, I know we've gone the long way around the barn, but the point is that if there is no resurrection of men, then there is no resurrection of any man, including the man Christ Jesus. And Paul's logic then goes on to explain the problems with that.

1CO 15:14 "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."

Now remember, the Corinthians believe that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead, but seem to reject the notion that any other person will rise bodily from the grave one day. Paul has now logically concluded that if no man will rise from the dead, then that would necessarily include Jesus Christ who was fully man.

If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead we have a serious problem. You cannot be the Savior of the world and still be in the tomb. And if Paul is going around falsely preaching that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and yet all men will not one day rise from the dead, then he is preaching a message which is useless for any eternal use.

This is the problem with all other religions of the world. They may have prophets, they may have religious leaders and gurus, but the bottom line is that if these prophets and gurus are not dead now, they will be one day, and none of them can defeat death and bring themselves out of the grave.

They may bring an apparent message of hope, and they may give principles of life for this world, but none of that will allow us to be reunited to a holy God who demands justice. And just like the Mohammed's of the world and the Confucius's and the Buddha's

of the world, they are all still in the grave. And if Jesus Christ is still in the grave then His way is no better than anyone else's.

And yet, if I come to you this morning and make all these claims that Jesus is better than all those men, and that His teachings are wiser than all of theirs, and that He is risen from the dead when He's not, then the faith you place in my words and this Jesus is useless.

You might as well join the Elks and place your faith in their leaders for eternal life. At least you'll eat well on Friday nights when you all come together for fun and entertainment.

But Paul goes on to describe himself as not only one who has been deceived, but one who has consciously made the effort to be a deceiver if he preaches in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if in fact men are not raised from the dead.

1CO 15:15-17 "More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

Paul has been claiming to be an apostle of God. Isn't that how he opens his letter to these Corinthians?

1CO 1:1 "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God..."

On the one hand Paul is saying, 'I've been sent by God and I'm God's messenger, but I'm not giving you God's message and I know I'm not giving you God's message, because the message I'm giving you is that Christ rose from the dead, and yet we all know that men are not raised from the dead.'

And so, Paul concludes, 'I'm a false witness if I bring you such a message of the resurrection of Christ. After all, God didn't give me that message since Christ obviously didn't rise from the dead.'

1CO 15:16-17 "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

This is a repetition of verses 13 and 14. Now, when the Holy Spirit repeats Himself as He does here through the pen of Paul you know He's trying to make a point. The point is, there is no hope for

anyone if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead. And the reason is that since God is a holy and just God we owe the debt of our sin to God.

We know what the debt is. The wages of sin is death. That's what we owe God and He will punish us for our sin. Now, Paul comes along and says that Jesus Christ has come into this world as a sinless sacrifice to take our debt, and that He died in our place and has risen from the dead to defeat death and sin and secure our place with God as He has reconciled us back to Himself through the risen Christ.

'But, you know, Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, I just thought it might cheer you up if you thought He did.'

'But, Paul, we do believe. We believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead.'

'I know you do, but since you're right about the general resurrection of all men, since no man will rise from the dead, you've been duped into believing that Jesus rose from the dead since He too was a man.'

'Oh, and by the way... those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are also lost.' (1CO 15:18)

'You mean to tell me that anyone who has placed their faith in Christ and have died, they have died in vain, they're also lost?'

'Absolutely, since they've placed their faith in an impostor. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob along with the saints mentioned in Hebrews eleven in the saints hall of faith, were all duped.'

They might as well have joined with every other pagan religion in the world and had a good time visiting the temple prostitutes and partying all night long in the temple, because this Christianity thing, whose leader is still in the grave, is no better than any other religion whose leaders are also in the grave.

Again, I go back to the premise that if someone wants to start a religion and make all sorts of claims that they've heard from God and that we need to follow them and their teachings, that's fine. But what assurance do I have that what they say is really of God? Well, if they rose bodily from the dead in power and came to me and repeated those teachings, now I have proof that what they said is true.

But, if I deny the resurrection of men in general then it makes little difference what anybody teaches. One way is as good as another since they all lead to death and separation from God.

Do you see the flaw in the logic of these Corinthians? Paul is hoping they will. Because if they deny the resurrection of men, in a sense they deny their own salvation. But the tragedy here is that they don't deny the resurrection of Christ and so they hamstring themselves from growing in the grace of God and the hope which lies in the future for themselves.

1CO 15:19 "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

In other words, if this Christ, who is still in the grave, is the one we're placing our eternal destiny on, then we are a sad lot. We're pathetic, wretched and pitiable people who haven't got a clue. Of course this is how the world views us.

And the reason they view us in this way is because, though they may acknowledge the resurrection of Christ, it's only a cute story to them. If the world really believed in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, in a couple of weeks when the church celebrates the resurrection, Dan Rather would be in Jerusalem at the supposed grave site, imploring everyone to embrace Christ who rose from that tomb.

This would be news. This would be an amazing discovery, that someone was put to death on a cross and then three days later victoriously overcame the grave and walked among men for some 40 days before ascending back to the Father.

But no, the Dan Rather's of this world see Christians as weak minded little robots following in step with their leaders who only want to control them with fairy tales about a resurrection.

Look, if we knew that Elvis truly died and was buried but three days later was discovered in Las Vegas doing his act and preaching a message that Rock and Roll really does set us free, you better believe Dan Rather would be there taking up the banner and preaching it.

If Jesus Christ is not who He says He is; Lord, God and risen Savior, then I'm wasting my time here. I along with all of you ought to go back to the world and get out of it whatever we can at whatever cost. Reach for all the gusto, because in the long run this is as good as it gets.

If we're only hoping in a dead Christ for this world then we've missed the boat, because this world is passing away. This world offers nothing. And the best we can expect is to take our little shrines of a dead Jesus to the grave with us.

What a sweet picture that would be as we each are placed in the coffin and our arms wrapped around a little plastic Jesus as our relatives send us off with a warm good-bye. Pathetic.

But you know what? Jesus Christ is not dead in the grave. The resurrection of mankind was always intended by God to be the last state of all men. And since there is the promise of a resurrection we should expect such an event. But more than that Jesus Christ is the proof that this resurrection will take place, because He did in fact raise bodily from the grave.

It is this resurrection which many people were eye witnesses to in the first century that Paul has been talking about. It is this resurrection which Paul himself was a witness to and for which he gave his life in ministry and ultimately his physical life as he was delivered up to death for his faith.

To suggest that Paul or any of the apostles gave their lives for a lie that they knew to be a lie is to go counter to the very nature of man. Man is a survivor. He might die for a cause he believes in, he might die for other people, but when given the choice he will not die for a lie he knows to be a lie.

To suggest that the disciples of Christ's day made up the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is ludicrous in light of how they lived their lives after His death. They all gave their lives as martyrs with the exception of John who was banished to the isle of Patmos because of his faith.

Paul gave up any status and wealth and notoriety of being a Pharisee in the Jewish community for a life constantly on the run as he brought the message of a risen Christ to the world, only to be greeted with beatings and stonings and shipwrecks and imprisonment.

Great career move Paul, unless of course Paul did in fact meet the risen Christ as he says he did, and knew without a doubt about his future hope found in the resurrection.

This of course is where Paul is going with his thought as we see in verse 20.

1CO 15:20 "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

This is where we'll pick up next week. Don't ever think for a moment that you've made a mistake in believing in a Savior you haven't seen. Don't you ever think for a moment that this Savior won't come through on His promise to you that not only will you see Him face to face one day, but that you too will be resurrected gloriously, to spend eternity in the very presence of God.

^{NAU} **John 20:29** Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

1 Peter 1:3-9 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

1 John 4:20 ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

We may not have been there that resurrection morning, but lots of other people were, and these people were dependable eye witnesses we can look to; even as Paul said earlier in this chapter.

1CO 15:6 "After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep."

Paul's implied exhortation to the Corinthians was, just go ask these people. Most of them are still alive and they will tell you that they did in fact see and meet the risen Christ. He was not a phantom, but the real thing.

Our faith rests securely on facts, not myth. We don't have a blind faith, we have a faith which looks to reality and then acts on it with the hope of eternal life because our Savior is alive and well, unlike the saviors of this world who will perish with it, be it wealth, fame or other people.

If Jesus doesn't come back for us first, your body and mine will die and be put into the ground. It doesn't make any difference to what degree it has decomposed or disintegrated, our Lord will reconstruct it from the same materials and molecules that went down into the grave, and reunite it in a glorious state with our spirits.

You and I will be resurrected in the same bodies, but our bodies will not be like the ones which went down to the grave which were corruptible. Our new bodies will be like Christ's, according to the word of God, immortal and incorruptible, never to die again, and thus we will be with the Lord forever.

There is a new world coming for the believer in Christ and that new world is the Kingdom of God that Adam lost but has been restored in the last Adam, Jesus Christ. We are presently members of that Kingdom with the sure foundation that Jesus will come back and bring us to Himself on that last day as he raises us up bodily to be with Him forevermore on the new earth and a new universe where there is no curse or sin.

^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

As Paul says to the Thessalonians, "comfort and encourage each other with these words."