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# The Resurrection and this Life

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

*Russ Kennedy*

People believe the most incredible follies...

What is the effect of this?

Christians believe in something that is essential. Yet, what would Christianity be if the resurrection were not possible? What if Christ were not raised from the dead?

### **The Importance of the Resurrection** **(v. 1-11)**

Paul opens by asserting the importance of the resurrection.

<sup>1</sup> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Note the bookending of this text: Paul has preached the resurrection and staked our salvation to it (v.1, 11). The resurrection is of vital importance:

### **In our Lives** **(v. 1-2)**

The resurrection is not merely an abstract, theoretical doctrine. It is intensely personal. We have an enormous stake in its truth. It is central to the gospel that:

Paul had preached as truth to them...

They had received by faith for them...

They had stood in firmness with them...

They had been saved in holding fast to them...

If not, then they have believed in vain.

### **In the Gospel**

**(v. 3-4)**

Here is what Paul had delivered as essential to saving faith. It involves both historical facts and Scriptural interpretations.

Christ died – that is a historical fact. That He died *for our sins according to the Scriptures* is the interpretation. It tells us why the historical fact of the cross is significant. Christ died for our sins in all the magnificently great and wonderfully complex ways that the Old Testament had promised and the New Testament saw fulfilled.

Christ was buried – that is a historical fact. It does not have Biblical significance. However, it did happen. To deny it is to effectively deny the death and resurrection. His being buried is a testimony to the fact that He died.

Christ was raised on the third day – that is a historical fact. That He was raised according to the Scriptures mean that Jesus' resurrection was anticipated and interpreted by the Scriptures. We go to the Bible to know for certain what Jesus' resurrection really means.

### **In His Appearances**

**(v. 5-7)**

The resurrection was well attested to. There had been many to whom Jesus had appeared. He had appeared to Peter and James. He had appeared to more than five hundred Christians at one time, most of whom were still alive at the writing of 1 Corinthians. Finally, Jesus had appeared to all the Apostles. Given what follows, this is very important. In order for a person to be an apostle, they had to have seen the Lord in person after His resurrection.

### **For the Apostle**

**(v. 8-11)**

So what about Paul? How does he claim to be an apostle? Because Jesus has appeared to him after his resurrection. He recognizes that he was not an original disciple. He was not part of the early apostolic band to whom Jesus appeared. He was unworthy because of his persecution of the church. But by God's grace he became a believer and was called to be an apostle.

His hard labor as an apostle is the effect of God's mighty in-working grace. God's grace made him what he was. And so, both he and the rest of the apostles, preached and taught concerning the resurrection. It was they believed. What all the apostles taught and what all true Christians believe about the resurrection is the result of God's grace.

### **The Denial of the Resurrection**

**(v. 12-19)**

But, there were those who denied the resurrection. Paul is going to take this denial on head on.

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For

if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

### **The False Assertion (v. 12)**

How can people say there is no resurrection from the dead? The apostles, to whom He had appeared after His resurrection, had proclaimed that He was raised. If there is no such thing as the resurrection, then Christ has not been raised. How can people say this when the apostles have preached it?

In other words, to deny the resurrection is to deny the Word of God. What the apostles proclaimed to be true is now written down in the Scriptures. It is the apostolic deposit of truth. To deny the resurrection is to deny Christ, the apostolic authority and the Word of God.

### **The Deadly Results (v. 13-19)**

There are four deadly results if the resurrection is either not possible or has not happened. But notice the parallel structure of this text.

<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

<sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

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<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

So what are the effects if there is no resurrection?

#### **Our faith is vain (v. 14)**

If there is no resurrection, then what we believe is true is empty and self-deceit. Our faith does not secure for us what it is intended to. It is useless to believe in the resurrection if it actually did not happen.

#### **Our preaching is a lie (v. 14-15)**

If there is no resurrection, then what we are preaching misrepresents God. It says that God did something that He never did. It has told a lie and called for faith based on an untruth.

#### **Our salvation is useless (v. 17)**

If there is no resurrection, then our salvation does not deliver us from sin. The resurrection is how we enter the new creation, the new covenant to be-

come the new man. If there is no resurrection, none of this happens and we are mired in our sin and sinfulness.

### **Our future is hopeless**

**(v. 18-19)**

If there is no resurrection, then our brothers and sisters who have died have gone to hell and not to heaven. The resurrection is itself a promise of life beyond death. If we only have a hope in this life while believing there will be life to come, we are simply pitiful.

What a mess we are in if Christ has not been raised. But the denial of the resurrection is a false assertion – it is gloriously true that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

### **The Affirmation of the Resurrection**

**(v. 20-28)**

In answer to the denial, Paul gives a resounding, Biblical affirmation of the resurrection.

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

The resurrection is necessary and supported by how the Scriptures speak. Thus we have the resurrection:

### **In its Planned Order**

**(v. 20-23)**

Two Biblical metaphors or themes are used to show why the order of the resurrection.

The Bible teaches about *firstfruits*. The Old Testament spoke often of bringing to the Lord the first fruits of a harvest, of one's flock, the best of one's effort. But what was implied that there was something to follow of the same sort. Bring in the firstfruits and the blessing on it would be the blessing on all that represented.

The Bible teaches about the *two Adams*. These are another way of stating the great Old/New paradigm of God's salvation plan. This is God's established order. There is first the old, then the new. There is first the old Adam in which all are dead. Then there is the resurrected Christ in whom all will be made alive.

### **In its Certain Victory**

**(v. 24-26)**

The resurrection also guarantees the eventual destruction of God's enemies. The resurrection is the present in-breaking of the future kingdom into this present darkness. It will reach its culmination when the Lord hands over the kingdom to His Father. From the resurrection until that day, Jesus is ruling and reigning. His dominion over sin and Satan was inaugurated at the resurrection and will reach its consummation in the New Heavens and New Earth. Jesus' resurrection

**In its Final Dominion****(v. 27-28)**

Paul wants to clarify something and head off a misunderstanding. Just because Jesus will hand over the kingdom to the Father and be in subjection to Him, does not mean that Jesus is less than God. Nor does Jesus' universal dominion mean that He is ruler over the Father. This interacting dominion and submission is part of God's plan to publicly demonstrate the God is the great end of all. He will be the "all in all".

**The Misuse of the Resurrection****(v. 29-34)**

Finally, Paul responds to the misuse and misunderstanding of the resurrection.

<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? <sup>30</sup> Why are we in danger every hour?

<sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

<sup>32</sup> 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." <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." <sup>34</sup> Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Now admittedly, this is an odd bit of Scripture. There are a number of acceptable interpretations and a host of totally wrong ones. I think that Paul is answering questions from the Corinthians. He has done this through the book. He appears to either answering direct questions or at least, knowing them, anticipating their responses. So he addresses three questionable misuses of the resurrection.

**The Questionable Practice****(v. 29)**

Evidently the false practice of the Mormon cult had already begun in Paul's day. It is a bit difficult to get away from the fact that the language seems to be just saying what it says. However, notice that he is asking a question. In fact, he is asking, "Why do the very people who deny the resurrection baptize for the dead?" There is a double error here exposing a great folly. They deny the resurrection. Then, they baptize on behalf of or in the place of those who have died? Why? If there is no resurrection then they have perished.

**The Questionable Courage****(v. 30-31)**

Secondly Paul says that if there is no resurrection, then courage in the face of persecution and death is a waste. Yes, he dies daily. But he has actually faced real death. What about the dying that comes with fighting the enemies of the gospel, the beasts in Ephesus. If there is no resurrection, why go through this. Just live a life of pleasure – for tomorrow we die and then nothing.

**The Questionable Morality****(v. 32-34)**

The resurrection does not excuse sin and debauchery. Some were contending that because of the resurrection, what was done in this body no longer matters. You can run with the crowd. You can drink to your heart's content. You can take the statement, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die" in an entirely different way with the same effect. No, you must awaken. You must stop sinning.

Because of their lifestyle, they had brought people into the church who had no knowledge of God. This was not lowering barriers; this was erasing borders. As a result, to their shame, bad company corrupting good morals were now sitting unopposed in the church.

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## Reflect and Respond

So, what about the resurrection in this life?

The resurrection is essential to the gospel.

The resurrection is essential to the Scriptures.

To deny the resurrection is to make:

Our faith vain

Our preaching a lie

Our salvation useless

Our future hopeless

The resurrection:

Fulfills God's order – first the old followed by the new.

Guarantees Christ's final victory and dominion, even over death.

Puts the Trinity on public display for our amazement and wonder.

Therefore:

The resurrection is not just about the past, even though it is a historical fact of the past.

The resurrection is not just about the future, even though it is a glorious hope for believers.

The resurrection is a powerful, life-shaping truth for our lives today:

To believe in it for our salvation;

To understand it for our transformation;

To hope in it for our courage when facing death;

To proclaim it as how Christ rules and reigns today.