

1 Corinthians 15 (Part 3): 12-34 • The Importance of the Resurrection

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We are—I think this is about our third installment in this chapter alone. It's a lot. There's a lot here. It's a long chapter. There's a lot of different things that the apostle Paul talks about.

We've made the point repeatedly throughout the study of 1 Corinthians that this is a corrective letter. Meaning that Paul wrote it to the church in Corinth to correct beliefs, behaviors, issues that were going on in the church that were out of whack, out of order, and needed to be brought into order. We've seen him address several of those things over our study the past several months.

As we pick up our study in verse 12 of this chapter, we're going to find that Paul is going to embark on his final corrective topic of this entire letter; and it has to do with the resurrection because it seems that there were some in the Corinthian church who denied any reality to the truth of the resurrection or any resurrection. People being raised from the dead. Oh, that's ridiculous. When people die, they die. Everybody knows that you die, you're dead, you're gone and it's over. And this rising-from-the-dead business is ludicrous.

How these people could get into the Christian church and start to perpetrate those ideas—I mean, passing along themselves as Christians—we don't know. But in the process of Paul addressing this issue with the Corinthian church, we read, actually, some really wonderful things about the resurrection. In fact, in this section of Paul's letter, we read more about the resurrection than anywhere else in the New Testament.

How do you like that? So—and that's really the case with a lot of 1 Corinthians because these people were so desperately in need of correction. We really benefit from the standpoint that we gain great insights and great understanding about various things related to those subjects that he's addressing.

Chapter 15, verse 12; look with me there; follow along as I read:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ 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. 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 futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

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

²⁹ 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? ³⁰ Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³² 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.” ³³ Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” ³⁴ 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.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Jesus, we need Your wisdom to help us gain a heart of understanding from the things that Paul is saying here in this section.

Teach us today according to Your Word, we pray, in Jesus' precious name, amen.

Whoa! I mean, it's like confrontation. It seems that people are always messing with the resurrection. Have you noticed that? I mean, everybody's always got something to say about the resurrection or try to twist this or turn that or whatever.

And this isn't the only time that Paul even had to deal with problems related to people messing with the resurrection. He wrote to Timothy—you remember in his second letter? Let me put this on the screen for you. He wrote and said:

2 Timothy 2:16-18 (ESV)

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

But avoid irreverent babble, (I like that) for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, (look at this) who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

Notice they're not upsetting the faith of everyone because there are some people who are strong enough to know that Hymenaeus and Philetus are full of hot air. But there are other people who are either new in the Lord or easily influenced, and they're being upset by these guys who were saying a bit of a different thing related to the resurrection. They were saying, oh, that's already happened. Really? Anyway, but they were—well, I like the term Paul uses— they were swerving from the truth.

Isn't that good? I mean, it depicts in your mind's eye, and that was in Ephesus because when Paul wrote to Timothy, he was in Ephesus, and they were also swerving from the truth or at least beginning to, here in Corinth, that Paul had to deal with.

We shouldn't be surprised when people swerve from the truth today about various things that are important to us as believers and how important Paul goes on to talk about in this in this letter. But the reason that all these swervings of the truth—I don't think, swervings is a word, but that's okay; you know what I mean.

I think the reason all those things take place is because the enemy wants to bring such confusion related to the things that are important for us to believe,

that he will get people to come to the place where they don't know what to believe. They're so confused—it's like, I don't know what it is up anymore. What do you believe? This guy says that, and this person says that thing, and so forth.

But Paul begins here by saying again in verse 12:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed (and what he means by that is: Listen, if we taught you, if we told you originally, and you understand that Christ is) raised from the dead, (then) how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

And of course, some of the people were saying this; Paul makes it clear that it wasn't everyone. There were certainly believers there who understood and held fast to what Paul had taught and so forth. But some of them were saying that there is no resurrection; it's ridiculous.

And you have to ask yourself the question: Why would somebody even deny it? Well, you have to understand that from a Grecian mindset. The Greeks considered a bodily resurrection to be ridiculous, first of all, because it was unnecessary. They believed that the body, the flesh, was evil in and of itself, and that the soul, they believed, was entrapped in the body of flesh, and death actually brought a release finally. The idea in the Grecian mind that the body would be resurrected or raised anew, that was like, “that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.”

Acts 17:32 (ESV)

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.”

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.”

In fact, you'll remember when Paul was speaking in Athens to the scholarly minds of the day, he was telling about the cross and salvation through Jesus. Let me remind you what happened. It says:

“³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.”

I mean, there were some of those— that was just built into the Grecian mind. It was like, Phew, resurrection of the dead? Come on, give me a break. That's

dumb. Fortunately, there were some people that day who wanted to hear more, but philosophically they were just opposed to this sort of thing.

Paul is now writing to the Corinthians, lest this Grecian philosophy begin to really take hold in the Corinthian church. He begins to speak to them about the implications of allowing this idea to spread.

Look what he says in verse 13. He says:

“...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.”

Some people just don't think through things: Yeah, I believe in Jesus, and all that good stuff. But I don't believe in people are raised from the dead. Really? Then Jesus wasn't raised from the dead. Oh, yeah.

But they just weren't thinking it through. Paul's like, you get it? If there's no resurrection, then there's no resurrection for Jesus either. Right? If it's impossible for people to be raised from the dead, you and I, future tense, then it was impossible for Jesus, past tense.

And what are the implications of that? Yeah. Verse 14:

“...if (Jesus) has not been raised, then our preaching is (empty—that's what vain means), and your faith is in vain.” Empty or meaningless; there's nothing for you to have faith in if Jesus has not been raised.

Well, that statement doesn't require a whole lot of explanation. The denial of the resurrection is a denial of the meaning of the gospel, the focus of the gospel, the goal of the gospel.

In other words, you guys know that gospel means good news. If there's no resurrection, there is no good news. It's bad news because Jesus is dead. He never came out of the tomb and who knows why the tomb was empty. Yeah, I guess maybe they just stole the body or something, right? That's it, close your Bible. Let's go home. You might as well put it on a yard sale. It's not going to do you any good anymore.

If there's no resurrection, we might as well start a bonfire with our Bibles, right? We might as well break down all these churches and just say, yeah, it was fun while it lasted. The resurrection is everything. It's everything. It is the proof that what Jesus did on the cross was accepted.

I found a great quote from one of my favorite Bible scholars who's with the Lord now by the name of Harry Ironside. What a great name. Isn't that a manly name? Ironside. I would have loved that name. I got this fluffy French name. Anyway, we'll put this up. Harry said:

The fact that [Jesus] rose from the dead is the proof that the offering up of Himself upon the cross satisfied the claims of divine righteousness and met every requirement of infinite holiness. God himself raised him from the dead in token of His satisfaction in His work... – H.A. Ironside

The fact that [Jesus] rose from the dead is the proof that the offering up of Himself upon the cross satisfied the claims of divine righteousness and met every requirement of infinite holiness. (Isn't that great?) God himself raised him from the dead in token of His satisfaction in His work.

In other words, God the Father said, boom! Stamp of approval. That's the resurrection. That's what tells you and I that what Jesus did on the cross was accepted, was received. The payment was received for you and I, for the forgiveness of sins.

Paul outlined some other implications. Verse 15; he says:

“We are even found to be misrepresenting God (see, if there's no resurrection, we apostles, we teachers, we're now misrepresenting God; and by the way, that's a serious matter because he said, we testified; it's like we got in a court of law, and we perjured ourselves) because we testified about God, that He raised Christ, whom He didn't, if it's true that the dead are not raised.”

Verse 16 goes on:

“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

Nothing's been forgiven. Nothing's been atoned for. You're sunk. It is as simple and as decisive as that without the resurrection.

Are you starting to see why the resurrection has been under such attack? Without it, we're sunk. Without it, we're nothing. Without it, this is as important in the eternal scope of things as a PTA meeting. Not that those aren't important; just not in the eternal scope, okay? You understand what I'm saying? We might as well sit around the fire and just sing Girl Scout songs—it doesn't make any

difference—instead of worship songs. It doesn't make any difference. We're wasting our time.

All right; he goes on; verse 18:

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”

Here's another implication: All those who died in hope hoped in vain, and their hope was false, and they are lost, and nobody can do anything about it.

And then Paul makes this statement in verse 19, which is very interesting:

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

That is a fascinating statement. In other words, what Paul's saying here is: If your hope in Christ is just for this life, wow, you are to be pitied. Why does he say that? Because if there's one thing I have noticed as I've gotten older—I didn't notice it so much when I was young, but now that I'm older, I've noticed how short this dumb life is. This thing goes by in the blink of an eye.

So, Paul says if your hope in Christ is for this infinitesimally small— it's not even a blip on the radar of eternity— if your hope in Christ is for this blip or less there in eternity, then you are to be pitied. He says that's pitiable.

Isn't that interesting? All right. Have we made our point about the importance of the resurrection and the implications of rejecting the idea of the resurrection? I think Paul probably has.

Now— having established it now, he goes on to teach about what we know and believe about both the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of the dead, of which you and I shall take part. And as I said before, nowhere else in the New Testament does Paul spend this much time.

He says in verse 20:

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, (and then he calls Him) the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...”

And I like that word—you might want to underline it, circle it, highlight it, whatever. “Firstfruits” is a great word. One thing about firstfruits is it does not

mean the whole thing. It means just the beginning of the thing. It's like you and I would refer to an earnest agreement or a down payment; but in this sense, it's the first thing to come, which speaks of something to come more later on.

Now, here's what's interesting about this word, firstfruits— and it's interesting why Paul would use the word, firstfruits. I don't know if you guys are history buffs. I think this plays into history, but it also plays into the beauty of the order of God's Word. All right.

You remember (don't you?) that Jesus was crucified during Passover, during the Jewish Passover celebration. Do you know why? Because Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb, which of course is talked about in the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled that. He not only fulfilled it; He was also crucified during Passover.

Well, that was a very important fulfillment, obviously, but it took place when Passover was being celebrated on the 14th day of the first Jewish Hebrew month, which was Nissan.

Now, we believe that Jesus rose from the dead on the 16th day of Nissan. Guess what they were celebrating on the 16th day of Nissan? The Feast of Firstfruits. Yeah, interesting, huh? Gee, I think God has this thing dialed in. Yeah.

Well, so the resurrection of Jesus is a fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits, just as His death on the cross was a fulfillment of Passover; and we see the beauty and the order and the majesty of God's Word related to those things.

Paul goes on. Verse 21:

“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.”

In other words, as you and I were represented by Adam in death, thanks, buddy, we now have been represented—in other words, we have a new corporate representative in life, and that is Jesus Christ. And just as we followed the consequences of the life of the first man, so also by faith, we will follow what the second man earned for us, which is eternal life or resurrection from the dead.

Paul repeats the idea of verse 22:

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”

And I trust that that refers to everyone who's hearing me this morning.

Can I just remind you about something? Because it says here in verse 23, *“Christ the firstfruits”* raised from the dead, and then all who belong to Him when Christ returns. We know when the resurrection is going to take place for you and I, it's when Christ returns.

Now, can I just remind you about something? All statements in the Bible about resurrection refer to your body. They refer to your body. The soul and the spirit do not get resurrected. The body gets resurrected. Why is that important?

It's important because, again, some people, when they read passages where Paul uses this euphemism of death for a believer, which is falling asleep, they have believed the teaching that we enter into a period of slumber—body, soul, and spirit—when we die; and then when Christ comes, He wakes us up, and we yawn and stretch in medium in the air.

Fact of the matter is, Jesus takes each of us when we die immediately into His presence. Paul said to be absent from this body—and he tells us right there, you can be absent from your body; you can move out; that's what happens at death; and when you are absent, he says, you are present with the Lord. We go to be with the Lord, the soul and the spirit. We go to be with Jesus upon death, right? Then we're with Him and we're conscious and we're cruising and we're aware and it's sweet, right?

And yet, when Jesus returns to come to this earth, the first thing that's going to happen is our bodies are going to be raised incorruptible. Now, it's not like we're going to just wake up at that point.

We're going to be with the Lord, and just in the twinkling of an eye, we'll be merged with this new resurrection body that'll never die—and I'm trusting we'll look incredibly buff and all the other stuff that goes with it. It'll never tire, and hunger, and thirst, and stuff, and it's going to be great.

But guys, just remember, it's your body that gets raised. You, if you die first before the Lord comes, you're with the Lord. You're enjoying His never-removed presence. And then the resurrection takes place of your body or what's left of it, depending on how long it takes for the Lord to get here.

Anyway—all right, I'm going to read the next grouping of verses together because I think they need to be taken together. Beginning of verse 28— I'm sorry, beginning of verse 24 through 28. It says— the reason these verses are so cool is: Paul launches into last days information that he didn't have to talk about, but he's giving us insights here that we wouldn't have known. He says:

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”

Now, the rest of the verses in that section just repeat or go into more detail about what Paul just said in verse 24. We didn't know this. Get this, guys: Jesus is ruling and reigning until everything has been subjected to Him. The final enemy is going to be death. That's going to be wiped out for everybody, and after the final enemy is finally vanquished, Jesus is going to turn it all over to the Father, and He Himself will be under subjection to the Father.

Notice, I didn't say He will be inferior to the Father, because subjection has nothing to do with inferiority, right? Every woman should understand that—who knows what it biblically means to submit to her husband has nothing to do with inferiority. It's a choice of the will.

Jesus—and if I read my Bible correctly here in these verses, well, let's keep looking at them. Verse 25:

“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”

In other words, God, the Father put all things under Christ, that Christ might bring them under subjection for the Father. And of course, Paul says, when it says all things have been put in subjection, it doesn't mean God the Father, because He's the One who put all things under Christ. But it says in verse 28:

“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 (speaking of God the Father), that God may be all in all.”

And so, if I read my Bible correctly, it says here that the same subordination that Jesus took on at His incarnation, He will carry through eternity. Do you guys get the depth of the incarnation? We like to talk about how God became a man so that He could come and die for us on the cross; and then we figure that whole chapter ended. Jesus was then raised— resurrection thing, all those

appearances—and then He goes up in a cloud to be with— and then it says from henceforth He is seated at the right hand of the power of God, and we figure, oh yeah, all things are like they've always been.

No, here's the incredible thing: Jesus experienced—I got to be careful about the use of this word, but it's theologically correct—the humiliation of becoming a human being. And by the way, for God to become a human being, it's humiliating. Sorry. But He experienced that subordination to the Father, and He will always be in that position for eternity. God the Son will be subordinate to the Father.

In other words, in whatever degree that Jesus set His will to step into our human condition and to become a human being, albeit also completely God, and don't ask me to explain that one to you. Fully God, fully man in whatever sense that He became fully man, He will henceforth forever be fully man and fully God for eternity. That's pretty amazing. That's incredibly amazing.

Now, verse 29— I know it almost seems out of place. Paul says:

“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?”

This people, folks, have just really gotten tweaked over this verse, and it just really has messed with a lot of people's minds because they wonder: Is this passage teaching baptism for the dead, as some people think so? But no, it does not teach baptism for the dead.

First of all— and there's two main reasons that I want to show you why it is not. First is a rule of biblical interpretation. Are you ready for this?

WHEN INTERPRETING THE BIBLE...

When you're interpreting the Bible, it is incredibly important to recognize the difference between something that is being merely **MENTIONED** and something that is being **TAUGHT as truth**.

When you're interpreting the Bible, it is incredibly important to recognize the difference between something that is being merely **MENTIONED** and something that is being **TAUGHT as truth**.

People, there are a lot of things that are mentioned in the Bible are not being taught to you. This is merely being mentioned. Paul is mentioning it because he's bringing to light the contradiction of some of these people who, on the one

hand, claim that there's no resurrection, and on the other hand, are going through this ridiculous pagan idea of baptizing people on behalf of dead people who couldn't get baptized. And apparently, it was a practice in the area of Corinth. It is nowhere taught in the Bible. It is only in this one place mentioned as a contradiction.

Paul's basically saying these people are talking out of both sides of their mouth. Why in the world would they baptize people for the dead, and then claim, on the other hand, that nobody rises from the dead? Why would you baptize people for them? That's ridiculous. He's saying it doesn't make any sense. Did you get it?

But I want you to also notice the wording of verse 29. Now, the ESV words it by saying, “*otherwise, what do people mean...*?” I actually like this better in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) because it's a little bit closer to the emphasis of what Paul is trying to say.

I'll put this here, and I even underlined it for you. Here's what he said. He said literally:

1 Corinthians 15:29 (NASB)

Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

Notice how Paul is distancing himself from those who do this practice. He doesn't say, “Otherwise, what are we going to do for all those people we've baptized for the dead?” He doesn't say that; he says, “...*what will those do?*” Notice they're over there.

Now, when Paul talks about things that are biblical truth, he says, we're doing these things. But this is— again, he's bringing up a contradiction, and so, he says, what are those people going to do who are baptizing others for the dead if they don't even believe there's a resurrection? You see? I hope that helps you to understand it.

But people, just understand this rule of interpretation: Just because something is mentioned in the Bible doesn't mean it's taught in the Bible as true.

I had somebody say to me years ago, well, the Bible teaches that we can contact dead people and have conversations with them. I said, really? And they took me

over to the Book of Kings, where Saul— you remember king Saul, not Saul turned into Paul, but Old Testament king Saul— actually goes to a medium, a spiritist, to speak to Samuel who had died.

And you read the story and dah, dah, dah, and she said, see, it's right there in the Bible. I said, that is a mention. That is not a teaching. God is not teaching you. That was a disobedient king who went to a woman who was a medium whom God had told the people of Israel to rid the land of. You got to read the whole Bible.

So, just because something is mentioned, don't get all bent out of shape when people go, well, I can show you in the Bible where, and then they start talking about something whacked out, and say, see, it's right there in the Bible. Just because they think it's in the Bible, it's something you and I got to fall on our sword over.

Anyway, Paul ends this section in verse 30 by saying— actually asking:

“Why are we in danger every hour?”

And the point of that statement is: Listen, if I'm risking my life—which by the way, Paul did on numerous occasions—if I'm risking my life and there's no resurrection of the dead, what am I doing this for?

Right? Verse 31:

“I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!”

Every day I put my life on the line—he's saying every single day—and I'll tell you why: it's because I believe in the resurrection of the dead.

And he says—verse 32:

(I ask you) *“What do I gain if, (from a human standpoint), I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised,”* That would be really dumb, don't you agree? It says, why did I do that? If the dead are not raised, I guess we might as well just adopt that saying, *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”* Right? Let's just party hardy, because when it's done, when it's over and we just lie in the dust, we might as well grab all the gusto we can while we can, right? Because this is all there is.

And he says—listen— verse 33:

“Do not be deceived (by these talkers; and then he makes this statement): “Bad company ruins good morals.”” Or corrupts good character, your Bible may say.

That's a good statement to remember when you think about people in your life who are yapping in your ear all kinds of ridiculous, unbiblical things. Some of you go to work—and you can't help it who's next to you at work, but boy, they're just constantly yip yapping about things that are unbiblical and untrue. And you got to be careful. You have to be very careful. Don't be deceived.

Verse 34:

“Wake up from your drunken stupor, (now, he's not assuming that they were literally drunk; he's talking about how it's just like that, you're stumbling around in this place of truth and lies, and you can't tell one from the other), as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

He says, guys, listen, when you go out into the world, and this is a good thing in your school, in your workplace, wherever you may find yourself, know this: There are people who don't know anything, and yet they talk like they're experts.

Have you noticed? Well, the Bible says... You know what you and I got to start doing when people say that? Two words. Two words you say to somebody when they say, well, the Bible says yada, yada, yada: Show me.

Show me. Here, open it up. Where does it say that? Well, I don't really know the Bible that well. I've heard it, but it's in there, let me tell you. Show me. You can't prove it? Then don't say it. And you know what? The vast majority of the time, they don't have a clue what they're even saying or where it's found or if it's —

I had a young gal write me just this last week, fifteen years old, just all distressed about people who said to her that God hates homosexuals; and she's like, is that true? I said, heavens, sweetie, He loved him enough to send His son to die for him—and that means all of us. That's anybody who's committed any sin. Good grief.

The Bible says God so loved the what? The world! That He gave His only Son. Hate? Are you joking? He bore their sin. That's not hatred. That is intense love!