1 Corinthians 15:12-19

The Resurrection Required

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. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 NASB

# Introduction

## What is the Gospel Paul Preached?

Paul has just finished reiterating the gospel message. He has outlined that he was the preacher [verse 1], the Corinthians were the ones who responded [verse 1], and that the gospel is the truth that Christ died, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the scriptures [verses 3 & 4]. He outlined the witnesses to the resurrection in clear detail leading up to this passage so that when he targets those who had for some reason rejected the resurrection they would be without an excuse. No one had slipped a surprised resurrection in on those who gathered in Corinth, erroneous theology had slipped in instead.

*Can you preach the life of Christ without the death, burial and resurrection of Christ?*

The Sadducees

The Sadducees believed some of the following key doctrines:

* No resurrection
* No afterlife or eternal state
* No angels
* No Spirit
* No rewards or penalties after death
* Only took theology from the Pentateuch [first 5 books of the Bible].

Paul’s rebuttal of the doctrine at Corinth doesn’t directly reference the Sadducees, but we see that there are theological undercurrents that the church had picked up. Jesus refuted the teachings of the Sadducees on this very doctrine Himself in Matthew 22:23-32.

*How did Paul know this teaching was going on?*

# When You Preach the Gospel

When the gospel is preached it is necessarily preached with the resurrection as part of it. Paul re-states this to emphasize that the gospel was not presented with gaps, it was presented simply, siting the Old Testament prophecies, and clearly attributing their fulfillment in Christ. When we preach the Gospel we do not get to add to, or subtract from, the message communicated here. The accusations Paul makes against the errant teachers clearly point to their failure to recognize what was delivered to the people of Corinth.

*How do you personally present the gospel?*

## Some Among You

When teaching takes place careful checking of doctrine should happen and error should not be tolerated. The church in Corinth appears to have had so much division in it that it was just commonplace for people to come together in complete disagreement. The church leadership did not appear to know how to handle this division and some of them were likely part of the problem.

*How should we deal with heresy?*

# Not Even Christ Has Been Raised

The very notion of the resurrection missing as a theological truth and a heavenly ordained event is absurd, but Paul emphasizes that the work of Christ is the very proof of the doctrine of resurrection. Paul knows Christ died, He had to for God’s wrath to be poured out, for Christ to become sin for us. Paul know that Christ was buried – it is not impossible to imagine him having gone to the (empty) tomb since he himself went to Jerusalem [Acts 11:30; Acts 12:25] – and he knew that nobody he himself had been responsible for condemning and murdering would have laid their life down for a hoax. If the resurrection was not real and Christ was not able to be resurrected those like Stephen who were dying for Christ as martyrs were to be pitied.

*What does it say about the power of God if Christ could not be raised?*

# If Christ Has Not Been Raised

Paul is about to go into the logical consequences for the church and all saints for all time as well as the disaster of his ministry. As Christians that are around 2000 years away from the events of the New Testament we see that the life of Christ, the work of Christ, and His death burial and resurrection are at the crux of history. So as Paul postulates: If Christ has not been raised we have theological disaster.

*What is the consequence to the Identification Truths we hold so near and dear?*

## Then Our Preaching is Vain, Your Faith also is Vain.

For Paul to describe these two critical elements as vain we need to understand what he means. The word translated Vain [κενὸν] means empty handed, without value, producing no results. Paul’s emphasis is that his message was carried through peril and at threat to his life for nothing. In 2 Corinthians 11 he lists a tremendous series of personal damage and suffering that would be just useless and unfortunate, of no value, if the resurrection is not real.

Furthermore, his message, if believed, would be worth nothing to those who believed it. Their belief in Christ would be a tremendous amount of energy and emphasis on something that has no value. In modern analogy it would be like putting the energy of a cross-continental run into throwing away a piece of trash away. The energy expended is irrational and wasteful.

Why does Paul emphasize vanity rather than just saying, “our preaching is wrong?”

# False witnesses of God

If vanity is not clear enough as an offense to purpose and truth in relationship to not believing in the resurrection, Paul then charges all believers with the accusation of being false witnesses.

He draws the logical extreme of the error, “because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”

*What are the consequences of being a false witness of God?*

In the Law (Exodus 20:16) it is forbidden to bear false witness against your neighbor, so imagine the extremely worse scenario of bearing false witness on behalf of God! In the Old Testament it is clear that you should be stoned for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:15-16)!

# If Christ Has Not Been Raised Your Faith is Worthless

## You are still in your sins

Paul’s beautiful testimony to the benefits of the believer throughout Romans 6 are all a lie if the resurrection is not real. The newness of life, the ability to abide, all of that is nullified and we run into this big problem of being disgusting before a God who would not redeem us. We would still be in our sins.

## The Asleep in Christ have perished.

Already by the time of this letter a number of believers had died of either natural causes or persecution as martyrs and those who had put their faith in Christ – which had been a comfort to other believers – had done so for nothing. They were simply dead. There is no longer comfort, there is only disobedience to the Law, misrepresentation of God, and an eternal state of condemnation [assuming they didn’t hold the Sadducee’s position of not having an eternal state].

# If We Have Hoped in Christ in This Life Only, We Are to Be Pitied

Paul sums up the sad state of affairs for those who call themselves Christians, but wrong because the resurrection did not and could not happen: they are to be pitied. Putting yourself into the shoes of the Corinthians where wisdom is a pinnacle of social status you can imagine being so foolish would be a major faux pas. You would pity such an ignorant fool, but Paul reverses the roles here as an exaggerative element in his reasoning. He brings to conclusion the reasoning in an attempt to close off this error in the church.

# Conclusion

Now that Paul has gone through the consequences of this false position he is about to take us into the next passage where he will take us into a parallel passage to Romans 5 and some eschatological implication. As believers we have the confidence of the witnesses in Luke 24; we have the canon of the New Testament; and we have the witness of the Holy Spirit to know that we’re believing in a resurrected Savior!

How is the resurrection linked to eschatology?