

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Title: The Resurrection, Part 3

Truth: What if there were no such thing as resurrection?

Date/Location: Sunday March 14, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Paul preached Christ. Key to that proclamation is that Jesus was raised from the dead. This is the foundation upon which all Christianity rests.

But there were some in Corinth who denied that there was such a thing as resurrection at all—of *anyone* at *any* time. This was an attack of the doctrine of resurrection in general. They did not limit it to individual believers; they made the sweeping statement that included Jesus Christ in their denial. This was a denial of Christianity itself, of the hope of the New Testament and Old Testament believer.

This error is like another that Paul wrote about in 2 Timothy 2:16-18. That heresy was that the resurrection has already taken place; it is a past event. How they postulated that is unclear. Similar errors exist today. But let us think with Paul about the meaning of a “no resurrection” idea.

I. The Opening Question About Teaching Contradictory to Truth, v. 12

- A. Paul starts out in verse 12 with a question. If Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some false teachers among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? That is rebellious!
- B. *How* can someone inside the church say out loud that there is no resurrection? How in the *world* can you contradict the basic truth of how you came to be a Christian and what makes this church a church? Are you in the church? 2 Timothy 2:19 comes into play here—the Lord knows whether you are truly a Christian or not...your denial of basic gospel truth means that He knows you are *not* in His family.

This kind of thing happens today...people associated with the “church” hold wildly errant beliefs. They must be called out, as Paul does here. These are not things we can ignore because it is not “polite” to deal with hard subjects. Rather, it is *necessary* that we deal with them because if we do not, we could end up allowing some people to go to Hell in unbelief. *That* is not polite.

- C. Next Paul lays out a thought experiment to show how ridiculous no-resurrection theology is. He lays out how many ways it is ruinous to the Christian faith.

II. Doctrinal Implications of the Resurrection Error, v. 13-19

Sometimes doctrine is wrong but it does not have wide ranging implications for other truths. Certain issues can be kind of isolated off to a corner of theology. Other times, a doctrinal error is wrong in a deadly sort of way where it wreaks havoc throughout the Christian theological system. The no-resurrection idea is one of those doctrinal errors. It is extremely serious.

- A. Paul starts with a supposition, a counterfactual assumed true for the sake of argument. The supposition is just what the false teachers in Corinth were saying: there is no resurrection of the dead at all ever.
1. Verse 13 If there is no resurrection of any dead at any time, then consequently (→) **Christ is not risen**, since Christ fits into the universal category of anyone at any time. What they are saying is that there is no such thing as being brought back to life out of the realm of the dead. Dead people stay dead, and that is it. In their minds, Jesus was still dead. What a sad way to think after having been taught of the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus.
 2. Verse 16 This is a repeat of v. 13. No resurrection → **Christ is not raised**. It is so shocking and so significant to the Christian faith that Paul is compelled to repeat it.
- B. Following are all the secondary consequences of the first consequence.
1. Verse 14 Christ is not risen → **Paul's preaching is empty**. The word for empty is *kenos*. It means devoid of spiritual value. It is useless. Because there is no underlying substance of resurrection, the entire teaching is pointless and without strength to accomplish anything. Paul preaches Christ was raised, and therefore we will be raised, and therefore we should believe in Christ and so deal with the sin issue that looms so large. But if the resurrection is wrong, then everything after it is meaningless.
 2. Verse 14 Christ is not risen → **Your faith is empty**. The word again is *kenos*. Both Paul's preaching *and* our believing would be empty, meaningless, without basis—if the supposition were true.
 3. Verse 15 Christ is not risen → **Paul is a liar** because he preaches that God raised up Christ, which could not happen if the dead do not rise in general. It is even worse than speaking nonsense. Paul is actually lying if the dead do not rise. Here the charge is that Paul is consciously aware that he is misleading the people he teaches. This would be

awful because he knowingly would be giving false hope. It would be like a quack doctor knowingly giving patients a placebo, but promising to cure their cancer. Or, like one doctor recently charged with giving real drugs to patients who do not have cancer! Both were schemes to make money. Perhaps Paul was, on the supposition being true, a fraud and in it just for the money. If Paul is a liar, so are we.

4. Verse 17 Christ is not risen → **Your faith is futile** (substantially the same as 14b). The Greek word for futile is *mataia*, and it means something like ineffective, something that is not really what it is made out to be. It promises something but cannot deliver because of some inherent flaw. Here, the problem is that it promises resurrection for us which, assuming the supposition controlling this section of Paul's letter, it cannot deliver.
5. Verse 17 Christ is not risen → **You are still in your sins**. One central promise of the faith is that your sins will be washed away if you believe in Christ. This can be promised because Christ died for the sinners and their sins, and then rose again thus demonstrating that His death did something more than what a normal human death accomplishes—which is *nothing* in terms of spiritual salvation. But without Christ rising, our sins are still with us. Then the problem is that as Christians we have been awakened to the awful predicament brought by sin; we know the guilt of sin and the desire to be rid of it in our lives. We know that we deserve death for our sins. With a lie for a faith, our sins would not be going anywhere. That is a terrifying thought. But without a resurrected Christ, does God even exist? Is there even something after life to worry about?
6. Verse 18 Christ is not risen → **Those who died in hope of Christian resurrection have perished**. Taking it one step further, you realize that not only are we doomed, but all those who have died before us are already in that state. They are dead and we will not see them again, they will never live again, they are lost in their sins too.
7. Verse 19 Christ is not risen → **There is no hope beyond this life**, so the only hope we can claim is *in* this life. That means we should hold the philosophy “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” What a pointless existence *that* would be—but it is logical if you do not believe in any afterlife. There are no consequences to how this life is lived in that view. Live it up, get as much as you can out of it, and then you are done. Yet what about eternity in our hearts (Eccl. 3:11)?

8. Verse 19 Christ is not risen → **Christians are the most pitiable of all people.** Others would look at us and think us to be poor, backwards creatures who believe something that is simply not true. False belief would cause us to make sacrifices that do things that are entirely unnecessary. In fact, at least some portion of the world's inhabitants does think that of us!

Conclusion and Application Questions for Thought

- A. The real point of this is that no one is permitted to say they believe the Christian faith and at the same time deny resurrection from the dead.
- B. Let us suppose for a moment that our Romans 10:9 belief is invalid, that God did not raise Christ from the dead. We would not be real Christians. Our sins would be still on us. We know that horrifying thought. Even worse, if there were no resurrection, it would be only a small step to belief that there is no God. And if there is no God, then there is no way we would ever have come to the realization of our bad our sinfulness is because there would be no God to work that repentant knowledge within us. In the no-resurrection, no-God scenario, we would not have even a clue about how bad we are. As it is, we still do not know the depth of it, but we do know there is a depth! And thank God for that.
- C. But I want to ask a more practical question: How would your day-to-day life look different if *you* believed there is no resurrection? Would there be a practical difference compared to how you live now? Do you live in practice the same way as you would live if there were no resurrection?
- Putting it another way, does the resurrection of Christ have an impact on how you live Monday through Saturday? In what way can people tell you believe the resurrection of Christ? How does it change your conduct or outlook on...*everything*? Do you handle COVID in a specific Christian way, or do you handle it in practice and thought just like everyone else in the world? Do you handle trials differently than the world? Do you approach your work with a different perspective? Do you approach living for the Lord with a resurrection mindset, that, as we will learn at the end of the chapter, guarantees that our work for Christ will be useful?
- D. Verse 20 brings us back to reality. **Christ *is* in fact risen from the dead. He is alive.** The assumption of no resurrection is in fact false. **Christians are not the most pitiable; there is hope beyond life; those who died before in Christ are not lost; Christians are not still in our sins; our faith is worthwhile; Paul is not a liar; and his preaching is full of spiritual value.**