

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

**Title:** No Resurrection Revisited: Resurrection, Part 6

**Truth:** No-resurrection theology is foolish and shameful in a church.

**Date/Location:** Sunday March 28, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

Recall in 15:12-19 that Paul introduces a big problem in the church.

Some were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. These are false teachers—even if they do not style themselves as “teachers” *per se*.

The Bible frankly admits that if there is no such thing as resurrection, then Christianity has a fatal problem. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not alive, and the following are also true:

1. Christian preaching is empty.
2. Christian faith is empty.
3. Ministers of Jesus are liars because they testify in favor of resurrection, which is false on the controlling assumption of this section of 1 Cor. 15.
4. Christian faith is futile.
5. Christians are still in their sins—and so is everyone else, for that matter.
6. Those who have died are gone and there is no recourse for them.
7. There is no hope in this life. And there is no other life.
8. Christians are of all people most pitiable because they believe something that is false, again on the controlling assumption.

But the apostle Paul cannot stop his analysis there. He attacks the false teaching head on by saying again that Christ *is* raised from the dead. And then he returns to the supposition, showing how foolish it is from the Christian perspective.

By the way, we do not expect non-Christians to be fully convinced by the argumentation here. This will work for those who have embraced Christ and take His claims seriously. For those who reject

Christ, some persuasive value may be found in these arguments, but persuasion is by a long shot not all that is necessary for a person to come to faith in Christ.

## I. More Objections to the No-Resurrection Doctrine, 15:29-32

After discussing the order of the resurrections and how this is connected to the kingdom, the apostle returns to the hypothetical assumption that there is no resurrection of the dead. He gives us some more implications.

9. It is pointless for people to be baptized for the dead, v. 29. Let me momentarily jump over the problem of what it means to be baptized for the dead. Why would we do *anything* in the name of Christ if the dead do not rise at all? What are they doing, and why are they doing it, if Christianity is false? Why do you go to church, read your Bible, believe Christian-type things, pray, etc. if there is no resurrection of the dead?

But we do need to address the issue of being baptized for the dead. What is it? It was a practice by early Gnostic groups (Cerinthians—followers of Cerinthus—and Marcionites). It is not practiced by mainstream Christians today, even Catholics, though some sects do practice it. It is known as *vicarious baptism* or *proxy baptism*. A living person goes through the ritual of baptism in place of and as substitute for the dead person. Whatever happens in baptism to a living person is conferred upon the dead person instead.

For example, the Mormon Church has practiced baptism for the dead since 1840. This is important to them because they believe that baptism is required to enter the Kingdom, based on a faulty interpretation of John 3:5 (see Ezekiel 36:25-26).

Recent changes were instituted in the LDS church in 2018:

“The changes, effective Jan. 1, 2018, will allow boys who are part of the church's Aaronic Priesthood -- between 16 and 18-years-old -- to officiate in baptisms **on behalf of individuals who are dead**, including as a baptizer or as a witness. These roles were previously limited to older males who advanced in the

religion's priesthood, designated as belonging to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

“Teens and others can currently **be baptized in proxy** for those who have died and who didn't have the LDS baptism ritual performed in life. The change now gives the younger men in the church's priesthood **an active role baptizing** others.”<sup>1</sup>

My initial suspicion about Corinth is that the practice of proxy baptism for the dead was practiced by those who say there is no resurrection. In other words, the false teachers were doing this practice. Paul was not approving of what they were doing, but rather he was asking why they did it if there is no resurrection. Please note, again, that Paul does *not* explicitly indicate approval of the practice nor does he teach it or about it. He simply states it as a fact. This leads me to believe it was an unorthodox practice that had cropped up in the church.

Let us review some basic truths that will help us understand what baptism for the dead cannot mean. Baptism does not save anyone, whether they are baptized themselves or someone else does it for them. Once you die, you do not have second chances to become a Christian or get saved or be baptized or anything of the sort. Baptism for the dead seems like an oxymoron. It does not and cannot make sense. The evidence that it was out of place is just this: modern conservative churches do not practice it or recognize it as a valid practice.

If you are pushed into a corner and must give a plausible explanation of a “positive” viewpoint, you could say that baptism for the dead is baptism *in view of* or *in memory of* or *in honor of* those who have died. In other words, faithful Christians had died. Others observed their faithful conduct and wanted to become Christians and be baptized. They thought of their baptism as “in honor of” the person who was a witness to them. Even so, if that were the case, why be baptized at all if you are just going to die and be annihilated—if the dead do not rise?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://kutv.com/news/local/lds-policy-changes-to-allow-youth-to-officiate-assist-in-temple-baptisms>

10. It is useless for a minister to jeopardize his life for the gospel, since the gospel would be nothing if there were no resurrection, v. 30-32.

The apostle Paul lived under a constantly elevated threat level. That is, his life was always in danger. He was the subject of death threats or actual violence in Acts 9:23, 14:19, 20:3, 21:31, 23:10, 23:12, 25:3, and probably quite a few more that are not recorded in detail (2 Cor. 1:9, 11:26). Let all nine of those passages sink in.

This was a daily threat for Paul. He resigned himself every day that today might be his last day. That is what he means by “I die daily.” But why would he do that if the gospel were false? It would be a ridiculous way to live. Just go make tents and get your social security and die.

Or, why would he fight with beasts at Ephesus? If there is no resurrection, it is not worth it.

What does it mean to fight with the beasts? I do not believe he experienced battles with literal animals. I think this refers to those “brute beasts” (2 Peter 2:12, Jude 10) who are pagan idolaters at Ephesus. Read up on that in Acts 19:1 (Paul in Ephesus) and then Acts 19:23-30 and following verses. This was an uproar that would have taken Paul’s life had his friends not prevailed upon him.

11. In fact, we might as well just live for the moment, as the hedonist philosophy does in v. 32, as if there are no consequences. If there is no resurrection of the just or unjust, then it does not matter what we do in this life. Without hope there, we live like animals here. No after-life in your theology leads to living for things that are mere pleasures, not eternally valuable. Isaiah 22:13 states the same philosophy 700 years before Christ, so it is nothing new. People figure that if their end is near, you might as well live it up.

## **II. Direct Confrontation, 15:33-34**

Having exhausted the listing of implications of the false no-resurrection teaching, Paul turns to rebuke the church for allowing such false teaching into its midst.

- A. Paul gives the church the general statement that evil company corrupts good habits. That proverbial statement has become popular to use outside of this context, and that is fine. It is useful for every Christian person because it reminds us that the company we keep will rub off on us. And that does not stop after middle school and high school! We can be influenced by constant closeness to people with godless philosophies well into our adult years. It might work imperceptibly, but over the course of time, a change can easily be seen.
- B. The context makes this proverb even more pointed. What Paul means is that there are evil people in the church who do not believe in the resurrection of Christ. They are bringing corruption into the church. Evil company does that just as sure as the sun rises and sets. The hope of the resurrection is a sanctifying, godly influence in the person's life, and in the life of the church. People who do not have that hope will live like hedonists (v. 32) and bring nothing but problems into the church. They will sow discord, cause division, teach wrong ideas, corrupt the young people, discourage the saints, and so forth.
- C. God calls the church to wake up to what is right. It is unacceptable to tolerate the no-resurrection doctrine in the church. To do so is sin, period. These people who deny the resurrection, simply put, do not know God. They are not saved. That is a categorical statement, because if you do not have the knowledge of God, that means the same exact thing as saying that you do not have salvation.

It is a shameful thing to allow the bad influence to continue to be felt in the church. Just like 1 Cor. 5:2. Something was wrong with the Corinthians' calculation of what was right and wrong!

## Conclusion

Without resurrection, Christianity is a nothing. But since the resurrection of Christ is an historical truth, resurrection in general is a reasonable hope for us. It is imperative to hold fast to it and not be corrupted by the smooth words of false teachers.

In the next section, Paul turns to the doubter's question about what kind of body the resurrected person will have. Then, he turns to the final aspect of resurrection, which is when death is completely conquered.

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