

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESURRECTION

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-34

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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are

put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”

Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

The Domino Effect is a situation where one event starts a chain reaction of similar events that happen one after another in a relatively short period of time.

Have you ever seen a line of domino stones fall in quick succession? It’s quite a site... In fact, every year sponsors of an event known as *Domino Day*, arrange all kinds of toppling domino exhibitions... *falling walls, falling pyramids, falling mosaics, falling spirals...*

The world record for most dominos pushed over by a group was set in the Netherlands on Domino Day 2009. A team toppled 4,491,863 dominos at one time.

I bring up *the Domino Effect*, because Paul utilizes it in 1 Corinthians 15. When it came to theology the Apostle

believed in *The Domino Effect* - at least when it came to the doctrine of the resurrection. He employs a domino toppling form of reasoning in this AM's text.

And Paul's points are some really big dominos!

He begins verse 12 with a question for the believers in Corinth. "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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen."

Notice the dominos starting to topple... "If you don't believe in the resurrection of the human body, and since Jesus had a body, then you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus..." But that's just domino one...

The toppling continues, "And if you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, the message of the gospel is empty... And if we're preaching an empty gospel; then we're guilty of lying to those to whom we preach..."

And if the gospel we preach is a lie, then our faith is futile... and if our faith is futile; then we're dead in our sins... and if we're dead in our sins, we'll never be reunited with our loves ones... and if we don't have anything to look forward to after death, then our sacrifices now are a waste of our one opportunity for a little pleasure..." So, *if all that's true - let's forget Christianity, shut down the church, and spend our offering on a dinner at Longhorns.* Well, that's exactly the conclusion Paul reaches in verse 32, "If the dead do not rise, *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!*"

And there you have a summary of today's passage. If there is no resurrection of the body, then really big and monumental theological dominos begin to fall!

Here's a similar line of dominos that tragically topple without a resurrection: "If there is no resurrection of the body; then Jesus never rose from the dead... If Jesus is dead, then death had power over Him... If death defeated Jesus; He isn't truly God... If He isn't divine and perfect; then He can't make a sufficient sacrifice for our sin... If our sins aren't paid for; then Jesus can't save... and if Jesus can't save, we have no hope..."

If all that's true; then Christianity is a crock - and I'm a con-man. Our faith is nothing but a sugar-coated lie.

Thankfully, that's not the case. The book of Acts tells us that for forty days after His resurrection, Jesus "presented Himself alive... by many infallible proofs..."

For six weeks Jesus kept offering undeniable evidence that He was alive. In fact, He kept dropping in on His men, helping them realize He was not only alive, *but at no time was He ever really far from them.*

Jesus is Lord and His words are true!

Realize, *Greek philosophy* and *Christian theology* were at odds on this issue of a bodily resurrection.

The Greeks taught that the human body is the cage of the soul. Man's ultimate triumph is to free himself from his fleshly prison. The Greeks romanticized the idea of being "pure spirit" - without bodily confinement.

Remember when Paul was just up the road in Athens, explaining Christianity to the scholars on Mars Hill, they were tracking with him, until he mentioned Jesus' resurrection. Acts 17 (32) tells us, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter.'" The mere thought of a bodily resurrection shut down any interest the Greeks had in hearing Paul.

The notion of resurrection was so foreign to them.

Christianity on the other hand, affirms the body's future resurrection - that our ultimate conquest isn't just freedom *from the body*, but transformation *of the body*.

Victory over death isn't achieved by simply **escaping** our human flesh - there needs to be a **reshaping** of our flesh. Both the OT and NT Scriptures teach that God's ultimate goal is the elimination of all sin's effects.

Everything that sin has touched, God intends to redeem - *and that includes our bodies*. Adam and Eve may've been created perfect specimens, but as soon as they sinned Eve notice crow's feet next to her eyes, and Adam's back started to hurt. Sin corrupted the human body, and a slow but steady deterioration set in.

God told Adam that if he sinned **he would surely die**.

He died spiritually the moment he bit the fruit, but his body died slowly over the remainder of his days.

That's why if Jesus' work on the cross achieves for us a complete and eternal salvation it won't just *reunite* us to God, it will also *resurrect* our corruptible bodies.

The Corinthians to whom Paul wrote were certainly Christians - *they believed in Jesus' resurrection*. But they had held onto a Greek concept of the afterlife.

And like he's done throughout the letter Paul's goal is to set the Corinthians straight. They were patterning their living according to *their culture*, not *the Scripture*.

Here, their pagan environment had even seeped into what they believed. Error had *doctored their doctrine*.

They needed to realize the importance of the resurrection - and for starters, if there is no bodily resurrection that means Jesus is still in the tomb.

It's sad, but even today, belief in Jesus' resurrection in so-called "*Christian churches*" is no longer a given.

A 2010 Barna Poll of Christians claiming to be "born again" found a whopping 30% don't believe Jesus "[came back to physical life after he was crucified.](#)" One in three don't believe in Jesus' literal resurrection.

Another poll found that 26% of Christians don't believe in their own body's resurrection - *that they'll have a body in eternity*. Actually, one in five Christians today admit to believing in some form of reincarnation.

This is astonishing. Today, if you talk to a Christian and want to know if he believes Jesus literally rose from the dead, you have to be exact... *not that he rose metaphorically to prove we can overcome our spiritual deadness... not that his soul flew back to the heart of God...* No, you have to ask, "[do you](#)

believe the body of Jesus that was crucified on the cross, and buried, literally return to life 3 days later never to die again?"

Again, the church of the 21st century bears a striking resemblance to the first century church in Corinth. Pagan skepticism and spiritual compromise, *rather than biblical truth*, was steering the Corinthian ship.

Yet 2000 years, hasn't weakened the arguments Paul appeals to here... He states in verse 14, "**And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.**" Paul knew without the resurrection, Christianity is a house of cards - *it all falls apart*. The toppling dominos lead to ultimate despair.

If Jesus isn't *the Lord of life* He's just another dead guy - like Buddha, and Mohammed, and Moses. Their bodies occupy a grave and testify to their mortality.

Jesus' body is alive and well, because Jesus is God.

It reminds me of the story of a well known German pastor named Schutez. During the Nazi rise before WW2, he attended a youth rally sponsored by Hitler's propaganda machine. The speaker was railing away at the Jews, when he spotted the pastor in the crowd.

The Nazi began to mock him. He shouted, "*Schutez, you're a fool, believing in a crucified, dead Jew.*"

Pastor Schutez jumped to his feet, and shouted so all could hear, "**Yes sir! I would be a fool if I believed in a crucified, dead Jew. But I believe in the risen, living Son of God!**" It's because Jesus Christ is alive that our faith is not empty, and our preaching is not in vain!

Paul asserts that *the literal resurrection of Jesus and the bodily resurrection of all believers* go together. *You can't have one without the other!* Verse 15, "Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise."

If you deny the bodily resurrection of the dead; you relegate Jesus to the grave - then you turn the Gospel of our risen Lord into a lie, and it's preachers into liars.

"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"

Our salvation necessitates Jesus having a human body. To die for our sin He had to be one of us. Thus, Jesus was *God incarnate* - 'God in the flesh.'

He had an epidermis, a liver, a spleen. His nose ran. His feet stunk... This week I heard a preacher say, "Jesus was both undiminished deity and unprotected humanity." Jesus was God, but He also had a human body, every bit like ours - even vulnerable to death.

And if His body is like ours in death, then it should also be in resurrection. That means if our bodies don't eventually rise from the dead; then His didn't either.

And if Jesus' corpse is lying somewhere in an unmarked tomb; then there's no hope for any of us!

We might as well trash our Bibles, sell off the church's stuff, split the money, then go eat some chili-cheese fries, and wash it down with a frosted orange...

*If life stops at the grave, then it's eat, drink, and be merry...
All that's left to live for is a little pleasure!*

And without the resurrection neither would there be any hope for our loved ones who die before us. Paul adds, "Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." "Asleep" is a NT idiom for death.

Paul is saying if Jesus didn't rise from the dead forget about seeing your believing mom and dad again, or putting your arms around your spouse, or hugging your son or daughter, or being reunited with a friend.

The reunions we've imagined are all a pipe dream.

Again, watch the dominos fall... *if our own human bodies don't rise, then Jesus isn't resurrected - if Jesus isn't God, our sins aren't forgiven - if our love ones aren't in heaven, we'll never ever see them again...*

Paul sums it all up, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

If there's nothing more to life than the here and now, then the sacrifices called on to live the Christian life just aren't worth the effort! If Jesus never rose from the dead, then "He who dies with the most toys wins."

If there's no resurrection for us or Jesus; then we've pledged our one and only life to a losing cause. We've hitched our wagon to the wrong horse. It's best to admit it, be a honest atheist, and grab for all the gusto.

Talleyrand was the prime minister of France during the French Revolution. He was an ex-communicated bishop of

the church. Once he was approached by a friend who'd tried to start a new religion. He believed it to be an improvement over Christianity, but it wasn't getting much traction. He asked Talleyrand for advice.

The prime minister admitted it's very difficult to start a religion. He wasn't sure what his friend could do.

He finally came up with an idea. Talleyrand told him, "I suggest you get yourself crucified and then rise again on the third day." The former bishop knew that all of Christianity hinges on the truth of the resurrection.

Read the book of Acts, the reason the early Christians preached with such fervor, and risked their all, and sacrificed their very lives was because they were convinced that Jesus had overcome death and He'd see to it that they would too if they trusted in Him.

This is why Paul proclaims triumphantly in verse 20, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

The fact that Jesus overcame death, and rose from the grave, and now dwells in heaven, in the glory of His Father... paves the way for you and I to follow Him.

The person who presents their body to Jesus a living sacrifice, will one day see the living Lord transform that dedicated body. We'll be resurrected like Jesus. For Paul calls Jesus "*the first fruits*" of our resurrection.

There was an OT feast known as "**First Fruits.**" On the Hebrew calendar it occurred on the first day after the Sabbath following the Passover. In the year Jesus died that was three

days after Passover. Since Jesus died on Passover, He rose on [the feast of first fruits](#).

And this is fitting, for typologically speaking Jesus is not only *our Passover lamb* - He's also *our first fruits*.

On that day, the Levitical priest would bring a bundle of wheat before the Lord. The sheaf of wheat was the first of the spring crop. It represented the remainder of the harvest - thus it was known as "*the first fruits*."

When the priest waved it before the Lord He was saying there was more to come, and it all belonged to God. This is why Paul compares Jesus to "*the first fruits*" of the harvest. Jesus was the first of many followers who's bodies will be raised from the dead.

And realize, there's a difference between being *raised from the dead* and *resurrection*. There were people who died and by a miracle were raised to life.

But every dead person Jesus raised, died again.

That's not resurrection. The resurrection we've been promised is that when we die, on a day yet future our *mortal* bodies will be raised again in an *immortal* form.

Our resurrected body will be immune to decay. We'll never die again. We're no longer susceptible to death.

Verse 21, "[For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.](#)"

The bodies of people who have only been born only once share the destiny of their father, Adam - they die and then rot,

either through burial or cremation. (*Burial takes 20 years. Cremation takes 20 minutes.*)

But people who have been born again spiritually - in Christ - are destined to be like their leader, Jesus. Like His body, ours will live forever. In His kingdom we won't be disembodied spirits. We'll have a body for eternity!

Right now, the believer's corpse or ashes, abides in the earth - whereas, his or her spirit fellowships with the Lord in heaven. Paul says so in 2 Corinthians 5:8. There he speaks of death for the Christian as being "absent from the body and present with the Lord."

But why this delay? Why have some believers had to wait now 2000 years for their transformed body? Why don't we die, and then head right for a body-fitting?

Paul explains in verse 23, "But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." There's a God-devised order...

Jesus was resurrected first. It happened at His first coming... But our bodies will experience the very same metamorphosis, when He returns for His church.

1 Thessalonians 4 speaks of that day, "For the Lord Himself will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (That's because either their bodies have six feet further to go, or their ashes were scattered and need reassembling - *both are easy for God to do!*) Then we who are alive and remain (and that we could be us) shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." What an incredible day that'll be! *I pray it happens really soon.*

And Paul says in verse 24, "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." The Bible teaches that after the Church is raptured, God goes one more round with sinful men.

For seven years, or what the Bible calls "Great Tribulation," He slugs it out. God puts evil on the ropes.

The knockout blow comes from Jesus! At the end of God's judgment Jesus returns a mighty warrior on a warhorse. He triumphs over His enemies in a single charge. He establishes His kingdom on planet earth.

And I love the phrase in verse 25, "*He must reign...*"

For justice to be served, for sin to be punished, for death to be defeated, for God's promises to be fulfilled, for the King to declare victory over His enemies, and for Jesus to be who He said He was... *He must reign!*

Realize what makes this life so difficult is that *the battles are never really over*. Our enemies are only repressed. We know after we're done with one trial another is on the horizon. This is life in a fallen world.

And this is why for there to be *real peace on earth*, all God's enemies have to be put under Jesus' feet.

He's *must* gather all the culprits - all the demons big and small - He *must* step on all the loose ends, and get everything under His feet, so that life can't unravel.

At His first coming, **salvation** was on Jesus' mind. At His second coming, He's planning **domination**. Gentle Jesus will crush all His enemies. He'll take kings by the scruff of the neck, and hold them under his big toe!

In John 5 (28-29) Jesus spoke of every person's bodily resurrection, but He described two phases...

He said, "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." Everybody's body will be resurrected...

Some will be *to life* - others will be *to damnation*.

In Revelation 20:12 we learn that a thousand years separates these two resurrections. The believer's body is raised before the Great Tribulation, so when Jesus wins His final triumph, we'll be able to rule with Him.

But after His millennial reign, Hades will be emptied, and the bodies of the souls that died without Christ will be resurrected - to be tossed into the lake of fire.

That's why verse 26 tells us, "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." Revelation 20:14 charts this on the timeline. Following Jesus' thousand-year reign, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."

But notice that death is still considered our *enemy*.

Don't buy into the modern mumbo-jumbo that *death is a friend we need to embrace... Death is just a soft pillow on*

which to lay your head and take your final breath... Death is just drifting off into eternal sleep...

No, it's not! "It is appointed for man to die once, but after this the judgment." Death is a dreadful thing...

When the renown atheist, Voltaire died, he screamed and shrieked for hours. It so terrified his nurse she vowed never to attend the deathbed of an atheist for the rest of her life. We don't hear more of those kinds of reactions to death, because we drug folks up in their final hours. But make no bones about it, death is a robber. It steals today's joys and tomorrow's hopes.

We'll learn later in Chapter 15 that Jesus has taken the sting out of death. Thankfully, it's lost some bite.

As Christians we can face death fearlessly, not because it's not fearful - but because Jesus won the decisive victory... *Yet death will always be our enemy!*

Verse 27 quotes Psalm 8:6, "For '(Jesus) has put all things under His feet.'" And that includes death!...

The ultimate goal of God's eternal plan for mankind is to bring all of the universe under the authority of Jesus! Then and only then will we really be at peace.

Paul then addresses a technicality. He doesn't want to create confusion about the nature and unity of God.

So He qualifies His quote of Psalm 8, "But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted."

The one entity in creation that will not end up under the authority of *the Son of God* is *God the Father*.

A son doesn't rule over His father, and Jesus won't rule over His Father. The three persons of the Godhead - Father, Son, and Spirit - are equal in nature and importance, yet they are diverse in their roles.

For Paul says in verse 28, "Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." Even in the Godhead there's a chain of command... The Father and Spirit exalt the Son - then in the end the Son will bow to the Father's will.

And God will be "all in all." He'll be perfectly united. The Godhead exists forever in an ordered equality.

Verse 29 is a puzzling passage, "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?" Now remember the context of our passage, Paul is trying to prove the resurrection of the dead to people who were formerly entrenched in paganism.

And there were pagan cults in Paul's day who practiced what we would call "proxy baptisms."

Several of the early Church fathers, including Tertullian and Chrysostom, witnessed this practice in their day. Folks were baptized for dead kinfolk, thinking the ritual would enhance their standing in the afterlife.

And there are cults today that do the same.

Mormons compile genealogies that identify their non-Mormon relatives. Then they get baptized in the place of these deceased family members hoping it will accrue to the person some sort of credit in the afterlife.

Some Mormons get baptized thousands of times.

Yet the Bible never warrants such an idea. Read again Paul's words carefully, "*what will they do who are baptized for the dead?*" and "*why then are they baptized for the dead?*" Paul doesn't say "us," he says, "*they.*" The "*they*" meaning the pagans in Corinth.

Proxy-baptism was never a Christian practice!

It was an aberrant ritual performed by pagans...

But at least the practice indicated a belief in physical resurrection! Why go to the trouble of being physically baptized for a cousin if you didn't believe their physical body would one day benefit? Paul's point is simple, "If Corinth's heretical heathen could see the truth of the body's resurrection why couldn't Spirit-filled believers?"

In verse 30 another domino topples... if there's no resurrection of the body; then, "*Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?*" In short, *why am I constantly risking my life?* Paul says, "*I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*"

Every day Paul woke up with a target on his back.

There were people out to kill him, all because of his insistence on the resurrection... All Paul would've had to do was take a pinch of salt, toss it on the fire in the marketplace,

and mumble three words, “Caesar is Lord” - and all his troubles and threats would be over.

But he couldn't, because **Jesus is Lord**. There was no denying the obvious, He had risen from the dead!

Paul continues, "If, in the manner of men, I have fought with **beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me?**" Remember, Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus.

And even in Ephesus he had run into opposition and persecution because he preached Jesus' resurrection.

He says he fought “**with beasts**” for the gospel's sake. That probably refers to evil men, but it's possible Paul had been thrown to the lions a time or two.

Again, why in the world would Paul forfeit ease and comfort - risk life and limb - for a lie? If there is no resurrection from the dead; then Christ is still dead!

All Paul had endured would've been a waste of his one and only life. Without the resurrection, there would be no reward - nothing of real value beyond this life.

Before Columbus discovered the New World, all the Spanish coins carried a picture of Hercules at the Straits of Gibraltar. With the inscription, “**Ne Plus Ultra**” or “**nothing beyond!**” But after Columbus the coins were changed to “**Plus Ultra**” - or “**something beyond!**”

Here Paul is saying without the resurrection all of life carries the insignia “**nothing beyond**” - but with the resurrection there is “**a beautiful something beyond.**”

Paul even quotes a local expression among the pagans in Corinth. "He says, "If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" Here's the final domino... *If death is all there is, then let's party!*

Let's take a permanent spring break. It's New Year's Eve every night! If all we have to look forward to is rotting in the grave; then life is nothing but a cruel joke.

Why sacrifice earthly pleasures for eternal rewards if there's no eternity? *If there's no forever, live for now.*

Of course, the reason some of the Corinthians had denied the resurrection is they were listening to the wrong people. They were hanging with a pagan crowd.

Paul writes to the Corinthians in verse 33, "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

This is timeless wisdom. It's probably the first lesson you learn from your parents, and it might be the first lesson you forget. *Hang with the wrong folks and you get hung up!* Evil rubs off. Choose your friends wisely.

Paul could've added this verse to any chapter in this letter. This was why division, and immorality, and rebellion, and a lack of love had drifted into their ranks, they were being influenced by the wrong people.

Paul encourages them, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." You've heard the old saying, "Ignorance is bliss." *It's not true!* What we don't know can hurt us! And these believers were ignorant...

It reminds me of a man in Bristol, England who dove headfirst off the local pier - 25 feet into the ocean.

He didn't realize the tide was heading out, and the water under him was a mere eighteen inches deep.

What he didn't know had a profound *impact!*

Yet this even went deeper... In the Greek language two words are used for *ignorance*. One word conveys a simple lack of knowledge. Being uneducated... But the other ignorance is the stubborn variety. It's ignorance that chooses to be uninformed in the face of the facts.

It's like the man who holds up his King James Bible, and boasts, "I read the version Paul read." When the KJV wasn't commissioned until 1500 years after Paul.

This is the kind of ignorance that says, "Well, that's what my daddy's daddy believed, and that's what my daddy believes, so that's what I'm going to believe." Even when evidence galore is refuting your prejudice.

This is the ignorance that *insists nobody has really proven cigarettes cause cancer... or I'm not wearing a seatbelt because I know someone who got hurt wearing a seatbelt...* This isn't ignorance because he or she lacks evidence. This is ignorance because of stubbornness, self-righteousness, and just plain pride.

And this is how Paul felt about the Corinthians when it came to the subject of the resurrection. It was so obvious to Paul that there is a bodily resurrection, *how could the believers in the Church be so blind to truth?*

These people were locked into their pagan beliefs despite *the domino effect* Paul had used to show them.

He seems to have used up all his reasons... now he just shouts, ***“Awake to righteousness and do not sin!”***

Let's hope they heard, and let's hope we hear...