

# The Apostles' Creed

Part 8

The third day He rose again from the dead  
*1 Corinthians 15:12-19*

*With Study Questions*

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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? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is empty* and your faith *is also empty*. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is futile*; you are still in your sins! <sup>18</sup> Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

## Introduction

Last week we reviewed the emphatic statement uttered by the Apostle Paul, drawing our minds-eye to the centrality of the crucifixion – that he determined not to know anything among his readers “**except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The cross of Christ is essential to Christianity that Paul informs his readers that they, so to speak, could forget everything else he taught so long as they had a clear view of this!

Later in the same letter to the same church we see Paul using similar strength in his language as he addresses the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen our “**faith is futile**” and Christians “**of all men are the most pitiable**” (1 Corinthians 15:17, 19).

It might be valuable when we observe this kind of language to recognize a figure of speech known as a synecdoche, where a part is used for the whole or vice-versa – the same way we might refer to a car as a ‘set of wheels’. When Paul writes of the centrality of crucifixion in chapter two, he most certainly includes the necessity of the resurrection which would shortly follow. Paul uses a similar approach in his words of institution of

the Lord's Supper, writing that when we eat and drink we proclaim "the Lord's death" recognizing the Lord's death being a synecdoche of the totality of Christ's work of redemption.

Be that as it may, if Christ is not risen, the Christian faith is reduced to a code of conduct, guiding men through their few years on this fallen *terra firma*, followed by a confrontation with a Holy and Righteous Judge while stilled clothed in our sins. And while that code of conduct is most assuredly the best code available to man (since it is the counsel of God), in the current context, those holding to that righteous code (unlike our current culture) were commonly put to death for the mere sport of Caesars – truly pitiable!

## Responses to the Resurrection

There are various ways people respond to the resurrection of Christ:

1) Some simply deny it. They reject the Scriptures, they reject the possibility of miracles and maintain an unwavering faith commitment in the face of the unimpeachable and self-authenticating words of Christ who is Himself the Truth (John 14:6).

2) Others have formed creative alternatives. H. E. G. Paulus, in the early 1800s promoted the swooning theory. According to this theory the Roman guards erred in their calculation that Jesus had actually died (an error that would have cost them their lives). Jesus was merely in a coma (perhaps induced) and came to consciousness as a result of the spices in the burial wraps. Conveniently, an earthquake toppled the two ton stone guarding the tomb and Jesus, having somehow overcoming the eight Roman Guards, convinced His followers that He was alive from the dead. So convincing was Jesus that His followers (as Jesus would surely have realized) continued to promote this error until it cost them their lives.

3) Perhaps the most nefarious response to the resurrection comes from biblical scholars within the church itself who, violating all the rules of grammar and exegesis promote a "discernment situation" theory. According to this theory when Jesus died, His disciples were in a state of confusion – being base and uneducated men. But after a time of reflection

came to discern the true significance of Christ and His teachings and “saw” Him in a metaphorical sense with their mind’s eye. R.C. Sproul called this the nadir (bottom) biblical interpretation, which amounts to sheer dishonesty.

4) Perhaps the most common danger to this vital doctrine in today’s culture of elevator music theology is not to deny but to deemphasize the resurrection of Christ—just ignore it and hope it goes away. There are any number of virtues the church can emphasize that will attract people who would like to see improvement in their lives.

Churches commonly transition into bastions of self-help, family centers and arenas promoting inner-tranquility. And there is certainly no shortage of verses in the Bible which help justify these gatherings with the label of ‘church’. But let us keep Paul’s sentiment in mind – to deny the resurrection, either forcefully, through trickery, deceit or neglect transitions the Christian faith into a futile faith.

## **The Response of Faith**

Then there is the response of faith. Belief in the resurrection of Christ is so critical—so interwoven into the fabric of redemption—that Paul’s call to salvation identifies the resurrection as that event which men are called to believe to be delivered from their sins.

**But what does it say? “*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*” (that is, the word of faith which we preach):<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:8, 9).**

And what is meant by a response of faith? Does it mean we jettison logic and sound reason—embracing nonsense—a stubborn clinging to our religious convictions against science and logic? Not hardly!

A biblical definition of faith does not mean we reject what we know to be true in our minds, replacing it with what we feel to be true in our passions; it’s quite the opposite. Faith and its antithesis ‘unbelief’ in the Scriptures carry an ethical connotation for which reason the author of

Hebrews writes, **“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:12).** A biblical definition of faith does not call men to deny what they know to be true in order to be saved – it’s just the opposite. As Paul had earlier taught, that God has “shown” Himself to men and “manifest” the knowledge of Himself “in” men (Romans 1:18, 19). Paul goes onto explain:

**For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,<sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:20, 21).**

All men know there is a God and have no excuse for their rejection of what they know – and this knowledge – this truth – is inextricably linked to Jesus and His claims, as He taught, **“Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37).**

So a response of faith is not a leap of faith into the darkness of folly and nonsense, it is just the opposite. And the means by which man’s natural proclivity toward the rejection of what he knows to be true is overcome, according to Paul, is not the presentation of evidence, but the preaching of the “gospel of peace” (Romans 10:15). Notice Paul’s rhetorical questions (all with the assumed answer of “they can’t”):

**How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?<sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things*” (Romans 10:14, 15)!**

Paul’s answer to man’s dilemma is repeated in verse 17 where, at the risk of repeating himself, he writes, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).**

I labor this point because many modern day apologists, unwittingly perhaps, have dissuaded Paul's methodology and have engaged in the process of answering the **"fool according to his folly"** thus becoming **"like him"** (**Proverbs 26:4**), especially what it comes to the resurrection. The detractors of the resurrection mount their academic, philosophical, historical, theoretical arguments against the resurrection – which can and should be answered and denounced. But then the apologist offers his own academic, philosophical, historical or theoretical arguments for the resurrection – thus becoming like the very fool he is seeking to answer.

I have never been impressed with extra-biblical evidences for the resurrection due to, among other reasons, the number of people who actually saw the resurrected Christ (according to the Scriptures) yet still remained in rebellion. The faithful response to Christ comes from the preaching of the gospel – when preachers and churches abandon that, men are left at the mercy of their own wisdom, about which Paul writes, **"the world through wisdom did not know God"** (**1 Corinthians 1:21**).

### **Empty Preaching, Empty Faith**

Paul makes it very clear in this morning's passage that not all preaching is redemptive. Dealing with the skeptics of his own day Paul writes,

**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 (1 Corinthians 15:12)?**

So the particular error Paul addresses in the rejection of a resurrection altogether (something we'll tackle later in the Apostles' Creed). People during Paul's time were asserting a universal negative – no resurrection of anyone! Paul then draws the logical conclusion:

**But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen (1 Corinthians 15:13).**

If there is no resurrection at all, then the application of this universal negative is that Jesus is not risen. From this, Paul draws numerous

conclusions about the vanity this would bring to his ministry and their faith:

**And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.** <sup>15</sup> 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 (1 Corinthians 15:14, 15).

Can there be a greater attack upon any supposed church, preacher or ministry which denies the resurrection? The preaching is empty, the faith is empty and the witness is false. Paul then goes on to explain why the denial of the risen Christ results in such emptiness.

**For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.** <sup>17</sup> **And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!** <sup>18</sup> **Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.** <sup>19</sup> **If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable** (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

The futility of faith in a Christianity devoid of a resurrection can be summed up in the six words in Greek and in English, **“you are still in your sins”** (1 Corinthians 15:17). Elsewhere Paul writes that Jesus was **“raised because of our justification”** (Romans 4:25).

The declaration of our righteous standing before God is inextricably linked to the resurrection of Jesus. In part, as a sign of God’s accepting of His atoning work; in part because we trust in a living Savior who, as our High Priest, continually intercedes for us (Romans 8:34).

Paul concludes this portion of his negative argumentation remarking on the hopeless condition which assails our hearts at the prospect of His failure to defeat devil and his death – **“Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished”** (1 Corinthians 15:18). We must keep in mind in these statements by Paul the extraordinarily high percentage of Christians who were not merely dying while having faith in Christ but dying because of their faith in Christ. It is in this historical context that Paul makes the statement which may not apply to the current cushy Christian environment **“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable”** (1 Corinthians 15:19).

## The Glorious Conjunction

Paul does not end his discourse here but applies what might be called the glorious conjunction **“But now Christ is risen from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20)**. And because Christ is risen from the dead, those who trust in Him will rise as well, Jesus being **“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20)**. This will be addressed later in our study of the creed. But as one cannot overstate the necessity of the emphasis of the resurrection of Christ, neither can one overstate the glory of the resurrection.

In the resurrection our greatest enemy – death – is defeated (Hebrews 2:14, 15) that every house of godly mourning becomes superior to any house of worldly feasting (Ecclesiastes 7:2). At the resurrection of Christ the earth quaked, the rocks were split, graves were opened and the veil of the temple, which signified the unapproachability of God was torn from above (Matthew 27:51, 52). In the resurrection the principalities and powers of darkness – those things which form the genesis of human sorrow and grief are made “a public spectacle” (Colossians 2:15), having been triumphed over by the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Christianity without a resurrection is not Christianity at all. But Christianity with a resurrection is the source of man’s true and abiding hope – an eternal victory, the conquest of the enemy of men’s souls – and the sure expectation that that which Christ has accomplished is sufficient to bring us peacefully before our Maker.

## Questions for Study

1. Explain what appears to be the Apostle Paul's main theological emphasis (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is a synecdoche, and how does it apply to the crucifixion and resurrection (pages 2, 3)?
3. Discuss the various responses to the resurrection. What are there strengths and weaknesses (pages 3, 4)?
4. What does it mean, or not mean, to respond in faith (pages 4, 5)?
5. How have some Christians unwittingly answered the fool according to his folly when it comes to the resurrection (pages 5, 6)?
6. Is all preaching redemptive? Explain (pages 6, 7).
7. What's so glorious about the "glorious conjunction" (page 8)?

