

Do I Really Believe in Resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

BI: The truth about what we really believe is not revealed so much by what we say, but by how we live.

Today I want you to imagine that you are being interviewed by a reporter who wants to talk to you because you have a reputation of being a devout Christian. The first question he asks goes something like this: “What if you come to the end of your life only to discover there is no God and no life after death? What then?” How would you respond? If there is no resurrection does your life make sense just the same?

In his book *Desiring God*, John Piper tells the story of a Cistercian abbot who was interviewed on Italian television. “The interviewer was especially interested in the Cistercian tradition of living in silence and solitude. So he asked the abbot, “And what if you were to realize at the end of your life that atheism is true, that there is no God? Tell me, what if it were true?” The abbot replied, ‘Holiness, silence, and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves, even without promise of reward. I still will have used my life well.’”

Now that is a beautiful sentiment if there ever were one. But consider this, when we ask the apostle Paul that same question, his answer is absolutely opposite the abbot’s.

The interviewer asked, “What if your way of life turns out to be based on a falsehood, and there is no God?” The abbot’s answer in essence was, “It was a good and noble life anyway.” Paul, however, gives his answer in 1 Cor. 15:19, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Why was there such a massive gulf between the response of the abbot and the response of the apostle Paul? Was it not because the promise of resurrection caused Paul to make decisions about how he would live his life that made no sense apart from the resurrection? We might say that there was no disconnect between Paul’s formal theology and his functional theology. You look at his life and you just have to conclude, that guy’s not living like everybody else. His hope is not in immediate comfort and pleasure but in eternal reward.

In fact, Paul says as much in his letter to the Romans. He writes, “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). What was the object of his hope? The resurrection. Paul’s belief in the resurrection explains why his life was so different. By contrast, the lack of belief in resurrection explains why members of the church of Corinth lived in a way that was practically indistinguishable from that of the world in which they lived.

In our text for today, Paul explains the futility of religious devotion and sacrifice if there is no resurrection. And by doing so he challenges us to examine our own lives to determine whether the theology we claim to believe is actually making an impact on the way we live.

Read 1 Cor. 15:29-34

I. Evidence of a Strong Faith in Resurrection:

1. The point of these first four verses is to demonstrate the obvious truth that a belief in resurrection should have an impact on the way people live. Now, admittedly, this first evidence is difficult to get our arms around.

2. Paul says, "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" Now I know what you're thinking. Some of you are thinking, "That's the weirdest verse I've ever seen in the Bible," and some of you are thinking, "I didn't even know that verse was in the Bible!"

3. The more important question is, what does this verse mean? And to be perfectly candid with you, my answer has to be... I don't know. In fact, no one really knows for sure what Paul is talking about here. We know that he can't be talking about Christians being baptized to somehow save dead people from hell. The Mormons teach that, but it just can't be reconciled with everything else the Bible teaches about salvation.

4. There are a couple of possibilities that are somewhat viable. The first is that Paul is drawing their attention to the fact that even those who are involved in the pagan mystery cults believe in resurrection. That's why they baptize for the dead. A second option that many conservative Scholars embrace is the idea that Paul is referring to people who became Christians as a result of the death of someone they loved. In this case the text might read, "those who are baptized *because of* the dead." In other words, they came to Christ largely *because of* the testimony of a beloved family member or friend whose love and devotion to Christ continued to make an impact even after death.

5. I'm not sure if either of these interpretations hit the mark. But it's clear that Paul is trying to awaken the Corinthians to the reality of resurrection and the fact that when one truly believes in it, there will be practical consequences in the choices they make and the way they live.

6. The reason these people were being baptized was because they believed in the resurrection of the dead. In this case, their functional theology was consistent with their formal theology. They didn't just *say* they believed in resurrection, they actually put their faith into practice!

7. What about us? We would agree that the doctrine of resurrection is true. That's our *formal* theology. But how does that work out in practice? How does our belief that after we die we will face judgment, receive reward, and spend eternity in fellowship with Christ and one another; how do those promises affect the way we live? Does it affect how we raise our children, the values we teach them, the ambitions we encourage, and the kind of education they receive? Does it affect the way we relate to the opposite sex in the workplace or where we invest our money? Does it impact our leisure, hobby and entertainment choices; or the way we choose to dress? Does it drive us to read the Scriptures, pray without ceasing and share gospel treasure with our

lost acquaintances?

8. Disciplines like this should not be motivated by some artificial, legalistic standard, but by joyful faith in the gospel's promise of resurrection.

9. The promise of resurrection ought to be the explanation for how we live. It certainly did for the Apostle Paul. Notice his question in v. 30-31. "Why are we also in danger every hour? ³¹ I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die daily.*"

10. Paul is saying, Because of the resurrection I take up my cross daily to follow Christ. Hardly a day goes by when Paul and his companions did not expect to be seized and led to execution.

11. Turn with me to 2 Cor. 1:8–10. Paul writes, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; ⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves *so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead*; ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope."

12. You see, beloved, the reason Paul lived like he did was because of the hope he clung to. People set their hope on all kinds of things. And the object of our hope always becomes the object of our worship. In other words, it will become what we most often think about, delight in, and sacrifice for.

If your hope is in making a lot of money, you will find yourself thinking about how to get more when your mind shifts into neutral. You will likely become a workaholic and sacrifice your marriage and family for it. That's worship

If your hope is in getting married, it will dominate your dreams and idol thoughts. You'll read books and watch movies that glamorize romantic relationships. And you will gladly sacrifice biblical wisdom and precious family relationship if necessary to secure such a relationship. That's worship.

If your hope is in being healthy and living a long happy life, you will likely give excess attention to your aches and pains, your diet, exercise, and medications. And when you get sick, you will gladly spend all that you have in hopes of getting well. That's worship.

13. Why did Paul live like he did? It's because of what he worshipped. He worshipped Jesus Christ. His hope was completely fixed upon the promise of resurrection because there he would finally get to see Christ. That's why he talked about Christ to everyone he knew. That's why he gladly gave up his health, his money, and his reputation. It was because his life was ruled by the hope he had in God who raises the dead.

14. There is no other explanation for why Paul lived as he did! Look at v. 32, "If from human

motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?" Instead of rewards, applause, money, etc.—for which men risk their lives, Paul earns poverty and infamy. What profit is that? What do I stand to gain from that if there is no resurrection?

15. But that's just the point, isn't it? If there is no resurrection then there is no good explanation for how Paul lived. But if God's promise of resurrection is true, then Paul's life of deprivation, rejection, beatings, imprisonments, betrayal, and suffering makes perfect sense.

16. Turn with me to 2 Cor. 4, because I want you to hear Paul explain this with his own words.
Read 2 Cor. 4:16-5:11

17. You see, the only explanation for Paul's life was that his hope was in God who raises the dead and will reward our faithfulness to him with "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." That was the "profit" Paul lived for. It was the motive that drove his choices, his investments, his relationships.

18. Someone may ask, "Okay, Paul. But what if its all a hoax? What if in the end it proves to be lie?" If Paul were that Cistercian abbot he might say, "That's okay. Live like a Christian anyway because holiness and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves, even without the promise of reward!" But that is not what Paul the apostle would say.

19. What would his philosophy of life be if there is no resurrection? Look at the end of v. 35, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

20. You might notice that the type face on this last memorable sentence is different. That's because it is a quotation from Isa. 22:12-13. In this chapter God had been calling the people to grieve and mourn over their sin and to return to the Lord, but they would not. The prophet writes, "Therefore in that day the Lord GOD of hosts called *you* to weeping, to wailing, To shaving the head and to wearing sackcloth. ¹³ Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, Killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, Eating of meat and drinking of wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die."

21. Like the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Paul is trying to communicate how foolish it is to live without considering the fact that one day we will be raised to life where we will have to give an accounting of our lives before the face of God Almighty. Oh, how dreadful that day will be for us if it is revealed that we set our hope on temporal pleasure, comfort, power, acceptance, and ease. How grieved we will be on that day if we look back realizing too late that the way we lived this life made perfect sense *without* the promise of resurrection.

22. You see, if we really believe in resurrection; if we really believe that it is appointed for man once to die and after that, judgment; if we really believe that God loves us so much that He has united us with Christ in His death and resurrection, then our lives will bear evidence of that belief - that eternal hope - in the choices that we make.

23. But what about those whose faith in the resurrection is weak? What if their formal theology and functional theology don't match up?

II. Evidence of a Weak Faith in Resurrection:

1. In verses 33-34 Paul has a word for such people. He says, (Read 33)
2. The word for "deceived" here means to be "seduced", "lead astray." Paul delivers his judgment upon the matter. The low standard of morality in the church of Corinth is inextricably connected to their disbelief in the resurrection. Paul warns them (and us) about the dangers of being seduced by worldly philosophy that corrupts our moral integrity.
3. The fact is, if we *really* believe the gospel's promise of resurrection; if we *really* long to please Christ, serve Christ, worship Christ and one day see Christ, it will change the way we live. In a number of significant ways there will be a marked difference between the way we live and the way our unbelieving friends and coworkers live.
4. Beloved, if we are not intentionally limiting how much of the world we let into our homes, our computers, ipads, phones, and T.V., then we are failing to heed Paul's warning. "Bad company corrupts good morals." Some of the brothers in Corinth were failing to sift the world's philosophies through the grid of Scripture. They were being seduced into believing things that were inconsistent with a biblical worldview and their tolerance of immorality, their divisiveness, and inappropriate use of Christian liberty were the evidences of it.
5. Paul's prescription? "Become sober-minded and stop sinning." In other words, "sober up!" Paul was speaking as to drunken men sleeping under the seductions of sensualism, hedonism, and intellectual pride. "Shake off the seduction and return to the joy of living in the glory of the promise of the resurrection!"
6. This is really practical stuff! Paul is warning that
 - A. A weak belief in Resurrection will open our lives to the seduction of worldliness.
 - B. A weak belief in Resurrection will tempt us to justify sin.
 - C. A weak belief in Resurrection will hinder our knowledge of God.
7. Paul says, "There no excuse for that in the life of a Christian." "Some of the people you are being seduced by have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."
8. What about us, beloved? What are our favorite movies? Who are our favorite actors, singers,

musicians, sports heroes, radio talk-show hosts, and politicians? Many of them don't know God! Should we enjoy being under their influence? Are there some changes that need to be made in how we live?

9. Let's ask ourselves the question, shall we? Can my life be explained apart from the promise of resurrection? Are the practical choices I have made for my home significantly different from that of my unbelieving neighbors and friends? Is my functional theology in line with my formal theology?

10. What practical changes does God want me to implement in my life in light of the promise that one day the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

10. **BI: The truth about what we really believe is not revealed so much by what we say, but by how we live.**

Exegetical Outline

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

²⁹ **Otherwise,**

what will those do who are **baptized** for the **dead**?

If the **dead** are not **raised** at all,

why then are they **baptized** for them?

³⁰ Why are we also **in danger** every hour?

³¹ I affirm, brethren,

by the boasting in you

which I have in **Christ Jesus** our Lord,

I die daily.

³² If from human motives

I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus,

what does it profit me?

If the **dead** are not **raised**,
LET US EAT AND DRINK,
FOR TOMORROW WE **DIE**.

³³ Do not be deceived [seduced]:
“Bad company corrupts good morals.”
³⁴ Become sober-minded as you ought,
and stop sinning;
for some have no knowledge of **God**.
I speak *this* to your shame.