

Have you ever had a dream wherein you dreamt of something tragic—something so scary or frightful that you actually woke yourself up that you might return to reality—well, this is similar to what the apostle Paul does within this chapter—from v13 he begins to speculate what would be true if Christ was never raised from the dead—he concludes in v19—"if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable"—he then wakes up, as it were, in v20—"But now Christ is risen from the dead"—as if to say—Enough of this speculation, let's return to reality...

Within this 15th chapter the apostle is addressing a serious error that was being propagated within the church—it seems false teachers were denying the reality of a resurrection—they apparently were not denying Christ's resurrection, but a universal resurrection, v12—"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..."

Where this false teaching had originated from we are not told, however denial of a literal bodily resurrection ought not to surprise us, as such a truth is foolishness to the carnal mind, for example, Acts 23:8—"Sadducees say that there is no resurrection (Sadducees being a sect of the Jewish leadership)", and then in Acts 17:32 we read of those Gentiles who lived in Athens—"and when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked..."

Thus the apostle addresses this error by first describing Christ's resurrection in vv1-28, and then from v29 to the end of the chapter he provides the fullest description of the saint's resurrection found in Scripture—his reason for starting with Christ's resurrection is twofold—[1] to rebuke them by saying—If a future bodily resurrection is impossible, then of necessity Christ was never raised from the dead, v13—"but if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen," and [2] to remind them that our future resurrection is a reality because of Christ's resurrection—accordingly, the apostle jumps back and fourth between the past resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of God's people—for as we shall soon see, these two stand or fall together...

I. If Christ Was Not Raised From the Dead

If there is no future bodily resurrection of the dead, then of necessity Christ Himself was not raised, and if Christ was not raised, at least three consequences would be true...

A. Our gospel is a lie—vv14-15

1. V14—"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..."
2. Here we find two related results if Christ was not raised from the dead—[1] all gospel preaching is in vain...
3. V14—"If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty"—it's useless, worthless, meaningless, and in vain...
4. Why—because at the very heart of the gospel message is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ...
5. There has been a revived interest in the last 10-15 years on the gospel—everything now is all about the gospel...
6. Preachers are preaching "gospel centered" sermons, and churches are claiming to be "gospel centered" churches...
7. But, for all the talk about the gospel, I fear few people really and truly understand what the gospel actually is...
8. Simply put—the gospel is the good news about Christ—about His person and work—who He is and what He has done...
9. It's for this reason, strictly speaking it's a message from God to man—it must be communicated through words...

10. The gospel is the good news, that God's Son became a Man, lived, died, and was raised from the dead FOR US...
 11. V1—"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand..."
 12. V3—"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..."
 13. Notice a few things about the gospel—[a] it was given from heaven—Paul received it as a direct revelation...
 14. [b] It was revealed first in the OT Scriptures—that is, the essence or substance of the gospel was promised in the OT...
 15. [c] The essence of the gospel is Christ and His death and resurrection—these are the very heart of the gospel...
 16. Notice, both the crucifixion and resurrection are the gospel, for there is no good news if Christ merely died...
 17. A dead Savior is not the gospel—a dead Savior who now lives is—this is the message the world needs to hear...
 18. Dear brethren, the death of Christ is not the gospel—the death and resurrection of Christ—this is the gospel...
 19. This is the apostolic gospel—this is the gospel that accords (or harmonizes) with the OT Scripture—this is the gospel that saves...
 20. Acts 26:22-23—"Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles (Lk.24:44-48)..."
 21. These are the words of Paul to King Agrippa—having described his calling by Christ (vv12-18), He then describes His obedience to that calling (vv19-23)...
 22. Notice, we find the same things mentioned in 1Cor 15:1-4—the gospel was foretold by Moses and the prophets...
 23. Furthermore, this gospel concerns Christ—His suffering and His resurrection—both must be preached to the world...
 24. Thus, if Christ has never been raised from the dead, the message we preach is useless and unable to save a soul...
 25. [2] The apostolic witness is a lie, v15—"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..."
 26. It's been properly said, that fewer historical events have more witnesses, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ...
 27. V5—"And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once...v7 after that he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also..."
 28. Thus, having witnessed the resurrection, or having seen the resurrected Christ, was a qualification of an apostle...
 29. Acts 1:21-22—"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection..."
 30. Thus, if Christ has never been raised from the dead, both the witness of the OT and NT is discredited and proven false...
- B. Our faith is useless—vv16-17
1. V17—"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is also futile; you are still in your sins"—this is the second consequence if Christ was never raised from the dead...
 2. We must distinguish between the proclamation and the application of the gospel—these are related and yet must be distinguished...
 3. The very same message that must be proclaimed, must also be believed—it must be savingly applied to our souls...

4. Perhaps put another way—the Christ preached in the gospel, must be personally believed and received by faith...
5. Or, put another way—the gospel is not merely a message to understand, but to believe and embrace for yourself...
6. If the gospel message is a lie (which would be true if Christ was never raised from the dead), faith in the gospel would be useless...
7. Faith has no power in and of itself—faith is only the empty hand that lays hold of Christ and His salvation...
8. Thus, faith in a deceitful gospel would benefit nobody—it would be useless—it would not be able to save anyone...
9. V17—"you are still in your sins"—that is, you would yet be in your native condition, which is described as being "in your sins..."
10. Thus, the question becomes—What does Paul mean by being—"in your sins"—what does this phrase include...
11. [1] We would be in the GUILT of our sins—that is, we would be liable to the punishment that our sins deserve...
12. Rom.4:23-25—"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Jn.16:10)..."
13. I want to draw your attention briefly to v25 and especially to the phrases—"because of our offenses" and "because of our justification"...
14. [a] The reason for Christ's crucifixion—"who was delivered up because of our offenses"—He suffered because of our sins...
15. [b] The reason for Christ's resurrection—"and was raised because of our justification"—that is, He was raised for our justification...
16. God raised Christ from the dead because the debt that our sins deserved was paid—the justice of God was satisfied....
17. Furthermore, God raised Christ from the dead, to openly show that Christ was Himself perfectly righteous...
18. Wayne Grudem—"When Christ was raised from the dead, it was God's declaration of approval of Christ's work of redemption...By raising Him from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ's work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer had any need to remain dead. There was no penalty left to pay for sin, no more wrath of God to bear, no more guilt or liability to punishment—all had been completely paid for, and no guilt remained. In the resurrection, God was saying to Christ, 'I approve of what you have done, and you find favor in my sight'..."
19. Thomas Boston—"When the just Judge opens the prison door, it says that the prisoner's debt is fully paid, and he has received satisfaction for all demands from him. Christ's resurrection was in effect a discharge of all the debt He had taken upon Him to pay..."
20. Thus, if Christ was not raised from the dead, we would still be liable for our sins—we would under their guilt...
21. [2] We would be in the BONDAGE of our sins—that is, we would still be enslaved to our sin as a MASTER...
22. Rom.6:1-4—"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life..."
23. The first thing I want to do, is remind you of the distinction between historical, saving, and public union with Christ...
24. Historically, we were in union with Christ when He historically died, was buried, and was raised from the dead...
25. Savingly, we benefited from this historical union, in time, when we were savingly joined to Christ by faith...

26. Publically, in our waters baptism, we were declared openly and publically to be in saving union with Christ...
27. Thus, in answer to the question of v1—Paul points them back to their water baptism, and all that it signifies...
28. It's impossible for a Christian to continue as a slave of sin, because we have been joined to Christ's death and resurrection...
29. When we placed our faith in Him—the benefits of His death and resurrection were applied savingly to our souls...
30. Our old man, that was a slave to our lusts and passions, died with Christ, was buried with Christ, and rose again with Christ...
31. Thus, if Christ was not raised from the dead, then we never raised with Him, and we are still walking in our sin...
32. [3] We would be in the LOVE of our sins—that is, our hearts would still be at enmity to God and in love with sin...
33. When God saves a sinner, He not only saves them from the guilt and bondage of sin, but also the love of sin...
34. Now, do not misunderstand me—I am not suggesting there remains no attraction and appeal in sin to Christians...
35. But what I am suggesting is this—when God saves us, He changes our hearts which includes changing our affections...
36. By nature we have no true love for God, Christ, His word, His law, His people, or personal and practical purity...
37. But this changes when we become Christians—when we exercise faith in Christ as dying and now living for us...
38. This underscores the tragic condition of man—he not only is under the penalty and power of sin, but refuses to leave it...
39. Man by nature loves his sin, and is willing to go to hell, instead of departing from it—he is natively wed to it...
40. Thus, if Christ never rose from the dead, then we are still in our sins—in the guilt, bondage, and love of our sins...

C. Our hope is empty—vv18-19

1. V18—"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..."
2. Here we learn that Christ's resurrection was not only necessary for our justification and sanctification, but also our glorification...
3. By "fallen asleep in Christ" is meant—they died as Christians—they died with the hope of eternal life in Him...
4. Thus, this phrase refers to the body and not soul—the body is said to sleep because it will rise in the resurrection...
5. In short—if the gospel is a lie and Christ never rose from the dead, we as Christians have wasted our entire lives...
6. [1] Because we have chosen the narrow way—that is, we have chosen the path that runs contrary to this world...
7. Matt.7:14—"because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it..."
8. This of course does not imply that the Christian life is void of joy and happiness, or that it consists solely in difficulty and self-denial...
9. But it simply acknowledges the fact that being a Christian in a fallen and depraved world, is like swimming upstream or running against the flow...
10. Daily we carry their cross, resist the devil, mortify the flesh, and work out our salvation with fear and trembling...
11. In short we walk through this world as pilgrims in search of a city, holding onto the things of this life with a loose grip...

12. Think of a soldier who spent his life fighting a battle that in the end proved pointless—or think of an athlete who spent his entire life running a race that in the end was worthless...
13. Thus the apostle Paul is not denying that the way of the wicked is hard, and that living a moral or religious life has benefits, even for this life...
14. But what he is saying is that, if this life is all there is, then we've endured all sorts of unnecessary afflictions and hardships, that in the end will prove meaningless...
15. Ps.73:13—"Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning..."
16. This is what the Psalmist foolishly thought—filled with unbelief and discouragement, he lost sight of the truth...
17. This of course was corrected when he entered the temple, and there heard the word read and preached (v17)...
18. There he was reminded of a future day of judgment, and the glories of heaven (v24), and the terrors of hell (vv18-20)...
19. Calvin—"They do not indulge in the pleasures of this life; they do not give themselves, as others do, to the enjoyments of this world. They voluntarily subject themselves to trial and self-denial; and if they are not admitted to eternal life, they are not only disappointed in this but they are cut off from the sources of happiness which their fellow-men enjoy in this world..."
20. [2] Because we have the highest expectations—those with highest expectations will be most miserable if those expectations prove false...
21. Most of you know that by HOPE Scripture refers to "confident expectation"—Christians have hope of heaven...
22. If our hope is only for this life—that is, does not transcend this life and world—we are of all men most pitiable...
23. This phrase does not mean, there are no temporal benefits of living the Christian life, for certainly there are...
24. But here is the point—Christians, more than any other people, have the highest and greatest expectations after death...
25. For example—my twin girls are about to turn 18—but think back 10 years ago when they were only 8 yrs old...
26. Let's say I told one of them about an elaborate birthday party with all the trimmings, but I say nothing to the other...
27. For the twin I promised the party to, the next few months will be filled with a joyful expectation of what awaits her in June...
28. And yet, let's say when June comes, something comes up and I am forced to cancel the entire celebration—which of the two girls would be most miserable...
29. Likewise, Christian people have their hopes set very high—they have the hope of a resurrected body, eternal life, and paradise restored, all in the company of their beloved Savior...
30. And if in the end all of this proves to be a lie—they are of all men most worthy of pity—for the higher the expectation the greater the misery if disappointed...
31. Application by way of EXAMINATION—here I want to first apply this passage to every professing Christian...
32. If everything we profess as Christians was a lie—would it be true of you, that you of all men are most pitiable...
33. Do you and I, live in such a way that if there were no resurrection, you, of all men, would be MOST pitied...
34. Or would there be no great difference—sure I wasted a few hours on Sundays, but outside of that it was no great loss...
35. I hope that I live my life in such a way that if our existence ended with the grave, I would be, of all men, the most pitied...
36. Our Savior said, Lk.9:24—"Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it..."
37. This is what a true Christian is—one who has lost his life for the sake of Christ—he now spends himself for Christ...

38. Furthermore—are you living, so expectant of what is to come, that if it proved a lie, you would most miserable...
39. Oh brethren, I am continually convinced that we fail to think about the glories to come in the degree that we should...
40. The Christians hope is primarily future—it's SEEING Christ, LIVING with Christ, and being LIKE Christ...
41. Yes, brethren, it is true—we have these things in some small measure now—but what is that in comparison to what will come...
42. Perhaps I can ask it this way—what is your greatest hope—what is your highest expatiation—what are you living for...
43. Is all that you're living for in this world—do you live for your children or grandchildren—is this all there is...
44. Bless God for children and grandchildren—but if this is all that we have, then we are of all men the most pitiable...
45. Application by way of CONSOLATION—here I want to apply this passage to you who are the people of God...
46. Christians are constantly bombarded with the unbelief and deception of this evil, blinded, and wicked world...
47. But I want to remind you this morning—"Christ is risen from the dead"—thus the Gospel and Scriptures are reliable...
48. You are no longer in your sins—you have been justified and are being sanctified—and you will be glorified...
49. This is actually, a primary purpose of the Lord's Day—why does John call the first day of the week—The LORD's Day...
50. Well, because Christ was declared Lord, Rom.1:4—"by the resurrection from the dead"—it was in His resurrection that His claims were verified...
51. It's for this reason, we don't view this Lord's Day any different then last Lord's Day, or next Lord's Day—every Lord's Day is Resurrection Sunday...
52. Our beloved Savior has given us one day every week, not one day a year, to remember and celebrate His resurrection...
53. And thus, every single Lord's Day, we must be reminded and encouraged—our Savior has risen from the dead...
54. BTW, our Savior has also given us something to remember His death, and like the Lord's Day, it's called the Lord's Supper (these two uniquely belong to Him)...
55. And how often do we need to remember His death—well, I suggest as often as we remember His resurrection—weekly...
56. Application by way of EXHORTATION—here I want to apply this passage to you who are not yet Christians...
57. If Christ was not raised from the dead, the gospel message would be empty, and the Scriptures untrustworthy...
58. But, dear sinner friend—Christ has been raised, and thus the gospel message is not empty but full of power...
59. The gospel message is not go and do this or that—it is simple—look away from yourself and come to Christ...
60. Christ lived, died, and was raised again for you—everything is finished—all that you need is found in Christ...
61. Are you a guilty sinner—then look to Christ who bore your guilt—are you in bondage—then look to Christ as your Redeemer—are you in love with your sin—then look to Christ, who alone possesses the power to change you...
62. Are you presently living your life for yourself—then come to Christ, and die to yourself, and now live for Him...