

# 1 Corinthians 15:12-34 PM

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening, everyone. It's really nice to see you all. My name is Aaron. If you haven't met before, come and say hi afterwards. We're looking at 1 Corinthians 15, 12 to 34.

If it's okay with you, we're going to jump straight into it because it's very dense and there's a lot to say. You ready? Here we go. Let's go. So verse 12 explains why Paul wrote this particular section of 1 Corinthians talking about the resurrection.

Verse 12 says, How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? So it seems that there were some people in this church in Corinth he's writing to who didn't believe in the physical resurrection of Christians.

Now why would that be? Well, the baseline sort of philosophical view 2,000 years ago in sort of a Greco-Roman culture was this, that the physical world was bad and the spiritual world was good. And they thought of our bodies as like these prisons which held our real self, our soul, which at death was sort of finally released into some vague existence.

[ 1 : 07 ] So no physical resurrection. So that was the kind of the spiritual soup that the Corinthians were sort of swimming in back in the day. So that's why some of them just put aside this idea of a physical resurrection.

And Paul goes to war on that attitude. Verse 13 he says, If there's no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. He's saying, look, if no one's right, if no one is raised from the dead, if that's unimportant, if God can't pull that off, then Christ didn't rise.

So that's his opening shot. That's his opening salvo. And then what he does is he does this kind of thought experiment from verses 14 to 19. So that first third there, sort of a thought experiment.

He says, If you don't believe in the resurrection, here's what that means. In other words, if you theologically throw out the resurrection, here is what gets thrown out with that.

So that's verses 14 to 19. And he names, there's at least four things, there's at least four implications of that, throwing out the idea of a resurrection. Let's go through them.

[ 2 : 13 ] Implication one, verse 14. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. Implication one is this. The gospel is nonsense.

It's empty. All this. If there's no resurrection, like everything, all of this, all of this, all of this, all we're doing, all of this, it's just theater.

We're just playing. We're just messing around here. It's meaningless. We're just making ourselves feel better. It's first implication. It's all vain. Next implication, verse 15.

We're even found to be misrepresenting God. Our faith is not, it's not just that it's, it's kind of vacuous and meaningless. He's saying here, it's deceptive.

He's saying we're just, we're just telling lies. Without the resurrection, we're just lying to each other. We're lying to the world. 2,000 years of books and thought and lectures and degrees and sermons and Bible studies and podcasts and liturgy.

[ 3 : 17 ] See, it's all lies if there's no resurrection. Next implication, verse 17. If Christ has not been raised, you're still in your sins. Let's think about Paul for a moment.

If you're new to the Christian thing, so Paul is this leader in the ancient church there and before he was a church leader, he used to persecute the church. So he would like, he killed Christians.

That was like his shtick. That's what he did. And now he's a church leader. How did he get past that? I mean, you've got things you feel guilty about, right? You have trouble getting it. How did he get past this?

He probably killed the friends of people he was now a leader over. How did he live with himself? Well, he knew he was forgiven. How did he know he was forgiven?

Because of the resurrection. Let me explain that. So if people commit a crime, sometimes they go to jail. And most of them are released at some point after serving a specific amount of time.

[ 4 : 17 ] So at the end of the time served, the door is opened. So that's the justice system saying, your debt is paid. So how does a prisoner know the debt is paid?

Because literally the door is opened. You're released. How do we know for sure that Jesus paid the price for our sins? Because the door is opened.

Because the resurrection happened. That's God rubber stamping, rubber stamping the sacrifice saying debt is paid. If there's no resurrection, Paul says, if Christ didn't rise from the debt, you're still in your sins.

You're still in debt to God. You've got no way of paying that off yourself. It's verse 17. Verse 18, the next implication. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Those who have died have perished.

If Christ is not risen, all the believers you have ever known who have died, they're just gone. There is no heavenly reunion.

[ 5 : 16 ] They are just gone. Those are the implications of a resurrectionless faith. Now verse 19 is a bit of a summary of this thought experiment.

Verse 19, If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. Paul's saying, if this is what you think, there's no resurrection, Christ didn't rise from the dead.

We have spent our whole life trusting in a corpse. And that would make us a pathetic people, wouldn't it?

Think about it. Let's think about this, right? Let's say there's an archaeological dig and they find the body of Jesus. I know it's impossible, but let's say they find the body of Jesus and they somehow identify it. You know, like it's all over for us, isn't it?

Like, you need to find another job. I'll be fine. You need to find another job. You know, you can find something else to do on Sunday. Join a tennis club, get some cardio. Like, I don't know.

[ 6 : 15 ] But this is all just, no resurrection is like a baseball back to the knees of our faith. Now, you might be thinking that's a bit over the top. There's lots of other good stuff in there though, isn't there?

Here's the thing though. Our faith is not, like our whole thing is not like a five-step program to a better life, right? To a better you. It's about the amazing news the good news of Jesus who died and rose again so we can be forgiven and rise again also to be with him and each other for eternity. You take out the resurrection, you've got a corpse that's dust now and everything we believe just collapses like a house of cards. All right. You with me?

That's the first section, the first third. That's the first section and Paul outlines the consequences of a faith without resurrection and it's dire. then in verse 20 he says, but, but, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

So this is the next section, the next section here and what follows is some of the, the reason why this matters so much and why it's so important and what it means for us.

[ 7 : 26 ] Verse 20, let me read the whole thing of verse 20. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead and the first fruits of those who have, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Okay, first fruits, you probably worked that out, agricultural term just means the first fruit of the season.

It's, they are the promise that more fruit is to come, lots more fruits to come. So because Jesus physically rose again, so will you. Jesus is set in motion a chain of events that cannot be stopped. Billions of Christians will rise again. That's the clear teaching of the gospel here. And I know this is very hard for us to wrap our heads around. But the possibility of all of this doesn't rely on your ability to get your head around it.

It relies on the fact that God is God, He has a plan, and He has infinite resources. Just as an aside, how should this affect our view of death?

I think we should still think of death as awful, we should still grieve over it, but it means we don't have to fear it.

[ 8 : 42 ] John Stott, who is an Anglican pastor and theologian, he's great on this. Let me read a short, short paragraph from his book called The Cross of Christ. He says, Death is still an enemy, unnatural, unpleasant, and undignified.

In fact, the last enemy to be destroyed. Yet, it is a defeated enemy. Because Christ has taken away our sins, death has lost its power to harm and therefore to terrify.

Jesus sums it up in one of His greatest affirmations, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though He dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. His promise is, you will never die, meaning, not that you will escape death, but that death will prove to be a trivial episode, a transition to fullness of life.

I love that last part. You know, in our passage tonight, it talks about death as sleep. It doesn't say death, it just says sleep. Christians going to sleep. And this is an ancient way of talking about death that ancient Christians used to describe it as.

And I love that phrase because sleep has this inbuilt promise of awakening. And I think it's a wonderful way to think about it. Okay, let's keep going here. Verse 21. Paul sort of unpacks this a little bit more.

[ 9 : 52 ] He explains how this whole thing kind of works. Verse 21. For as by man came death, by man also came, came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, but also in Christ shall all be made alive. So the man here is Adam. It means we're in this mess because of Adam, because we're like Adam in our nature. We resist God.

We push back against God. But it also says now we are in Christ. Which means this. When it comes to new life, what's true for Jesus is true for you.

What's true for Jesus is now true for you. So you too will come back from the dead, like he did, in a resurrected body that won't decay and you will live in perfect relationship with your heavenly father and each other.

Paul then puts this into the context of everything else Jesus will do at the end of the age in verses 24 to 26. It's behind me here. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom of God, the father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power, for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

[ 10 : 59 ] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. So this describes this comprehensive overcoming of evil. everything opposed to God will be done away with all sad things undone, including our great enemy, death.

And I could prattle on about that for a while, but you cannot do better than just reading some of the last words of the Bible, Revelation 21, which describe this to us. Revelation 21.

Isn't that brilliant?

Paul continues by telling us in verse 28, that when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all.

Okay, a bit confusing. Here's what it means. That once all things are subject to Christ, once he has defeated all of God's enemies, once all the bad things are vanquished, Christ in humility will hand back the kingship of the universe to his heavenly Father.

[ 12 : 19 ] Okay, so where are we in the sermon? Where are we in the sermon? First, Paul, in the first third, says, I mean, he's just so disturbed that some people in the church don't believe in the resurrection and he goes to a war on that and he goes, there is no gospel without the resurrection.

Then, positively, he unpacks the meaning of the resurrection for us. Now, finally, and quickly in verses 29 to 33, he gets quite practical. But, we kind of have to deal with verse 29 here.

Let me read it to you because it's pretty, it's interesting. Verse 29, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

So, so, one scholar I read this week said, here are 13 possible interpretations and, there's no consensus on this.

So, you know, were there a group of people in the Corinthian church who were getting baptized on behalf of their dead relatives? So, like a Mormon thing? I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. When it says dead, is it maybe just talking about everyone being spiritually dead who are getting baptized?

[ 13 : 31 ] We just, we just kind of don't know. But, whatever it means, Paul's point is this. Baptism is meaningless without the resurrection because baptism symbolizes, it's a symbol of a spiritual reality, right?

So, it's people going down in the water, it's death coming out of the water, it's life, and if you don't believe in the resurrection, like, what are you just, what are you doing? You're just playing, you're just playing around with symbols.

Okay, so let's, let's get to verses 31 and 32 where Paul gets quite practical here. He says, and it's quite, it's a bit wacky as well, he says, I protest brothers by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus, say oh Lord, I die every day.

What do I gain if humanly speaking I fought with beasts in Ephesus, we're not sure about that, if the dead are not raised let us eat, drink for tomorrow we die. So he's talking about fighting beasts and dying every day, what's he on about?

He's saying, I live this really precarious life, how do you think I'm doing that? Like, how do I justify this life? There's other stuff I could be doing that doesn't include people wanting to kill me.

[14:32] He's, Paul is saying, I can live like that because I believe in the resurrection, because I believe this life is not all there is. If the dead are not raised, let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die.

He's saying, look, you know, there's the rubric for life just out there is just, you know, maximize your joy and minimize your pain. That's the world's advice. But Paul is saying, I can actually live with pain in my life. I can live with hardship for the sake of the gospel.

Because Jesus is my treasure and eternity waits. It's a great challenge for us, I think, isn't it?

There's so many decisions we make. It's all about, you know, it's like, well, I don't want to do this.

I don't want to serve or give or donate or befriend this person or go to that lunch or do this thing because it will kind of be slightly burdensome for me, you know, for like five minutes right now.

And I want to prioritize my comfort. And when we think like that, we're implicitly saying, we're implicitly believing or living like, this is all there is. This is my whole life.

[15:41] Eat, drink, be merry. You know, this is it. This is all I've got. And Paul says, lift your eyes. Lift your eyes. The next verse, he basically, he says in verse 33, this is the bad company ruins good morals.

That was just like a phrase, like a maxim back in the days, like a saying. And he's using it and he's saying, who taught you to think like this? Who taught you to think this is all you've got?

That you have to maximize all your joy right now, you know? Because you've been going to the wrong parties. You've been reading the wrong books. You've been listening to the wrong podcasts. You've been hanging out with the wrong people. Verse 34, wake up from your drunken stupor. You've taken your eyes off the prize. See, when the resurrection is not part of the way you think and live, naturally, you're just going to live for now.

Are you going to live for your maximum amount of comfort in your life right now? Paul says, come to your senses, people. Let me finish really quickly here. This is a great challenge for us, you know.

[16:44] Here's the thing, is I think most of us here will probably sign off on the resurrection. Am I right? You can be late. I believe in the resurrection. I believe in the resurrection.

Yes, yes, yes, yes. Okay. I will rise from the doom. Okay, that's good. But this final bit of the passage helps us see that it's not good enough just to agree with that doctrinally.

You've got to let it shape you. So don't just, I mean, he's saying in this last whole section, don't just look forward to the resurrection or don't just sort of park it over in your life over here somewhere as this kind of cool thing that'll happen at some point but I don't have to worry about it now.

Don't just look forward to it. Let it shape how you live now. So you don't just live to maximize your own comfort right now in your life. I remember speaking to Jeremy Curry, it must have been 13 years ago and we had a brief conversation after church service.

You just told everyone you're going to Nepal and I remember thinking and I remember coming up to you afterwards and I said, why are you going to Nepal? I mean, they need missionaries in the British Virgin Islands, you know, Vanuatu.

[18:00] These are lovely places, you know. Why are you going to Nepal? And you said to me, I did the research, this is the hardest mission field in the world and it's always, it's always stuck with me.

Let the truth of the resurrection shape how you live now. Let it invade all of your decisions and if you do that, I promise you, you will live more sacrificially and you will live more courageously.

Amen.