

## "The Necessity of the Resurrection" 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

### Introduction

- The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most fantastic of all Christian claims—Jesus Christ rose from the dead.<sup>1</sup> Fantastic, yes. But not unbelievable. What does it really mean to say that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? Is Jesus just a surviving influence? Like a dead Gandhi who continues to have influence from the grave, is that all we mean when we say Jesus rose from the dead? His life and teachings continue to influence us?
- When we say that Jesus rose do we simply mean that Jesus continues to exert his power and influence on our lives?<sup>2</sup> Is that all that is meant by the resurrection? Is Jesus' resurrection the resuscitation of a dead corpse? What do you really mean when you say that Jesus was resurrected?
- This week I came across a news story about a Hungarian man who was reported dead by his wife in 2001. The man's wife said he had drowned while windsurfing on holiday in Greece. His body was never found and a Hungarian court declared him legally dead in 2003. The man had taken out several life insurance policies in 2000, worth more than \$1.15 million, and he also bought travel insurance before going to Greece. Last year, the man was detained by Czech police who handed him over to Hungary. He told Hungarian police that after the "accident" he had swum to shore where a friend gave him clothes and forged documents. He fled to Crete, Italy and finally to the Czech Republic. His wife is being questioned by police as an accomplice.<sup>3</sup>
- Is that what Jesus did? With the help of eleven accomplices, faked his death, cashed in his insurance policy and set up shop in a nice little coastal town along the shore of the Sea of Galilee? What do you really believe when you tell others that Jesus was resurrected?
- The teaching of the Bible is not simply that Jesus is alive, true as that may be, but that Jesus is risen. That's not just semantics, there is a huge difference. Risen means he was dead. And risen means that he was brought back to life. But risen also means his body was changed—transformed, transfigured.
- Resurrection. The dead restored to life. [John Calvin](#) once wrote, "It is difficult to believe that bodies, when consumed with rottenness, will at length be raised up in their season."<sup>4</sup> But that's what we as Christians believe. And if there's no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, there's no such thing as the Christian faith. Christianity rises or falls on the doctrine of the resurrection. It is the single most important doctrine of the church. But what if Christians we're wrong? What if the dead do not rise?

### Proposition

- **While I believe with all my heart that there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead...**

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> © Reuters News Service, reporting by Krisztina Than; editing by Robert Woodward, Feb. 5, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin's *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 990.

## Transition

This morning, I want to play a “what if” game with you. What if there is no such thing as the resurrection from the dead. This most fantastic of all Christian claims, the dead restored to life, what if it isn’t true.

## Organizational Sentence

- **1 Corinthians 15:12-19 describes three consequences of denying the resurrection of the dead**

## Background and Setting

- The biggest turtle in the road the Corinthian church hit related to their understanding of the resurrection. They believed Christ was resurrected. But they denied a general resurrection for everyone else. Gordon Fee points out that “the idea that the body would be raised would have been anathema [to the Corinthians].”<sup>5</sup> Intellectual suicide. Doesn’t sound all that different than the way things are now.
- So what Paul does to deal with this mammoth turtle in the road and what we are going to do this morning is role play the logical consequences, the slippery slope of what it would in fact mean to say there’s no such thing as the resurrection of the body. What if every person who went to the grave stayed in the grave? In verses 12-19, Paul strings together a whole litany of conditional statements, *if* statements that Paul wants us to assume true for the sake of argument.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Paul believed with all his heart there was a resurrection of the dead. And he’s arguing to prove that point and show the absurdity of denying a resurrection of the dead. And he makes his point by asking what if questions. What if there there’s no such thing as the resurrection of the dead? “Let’s assume it’s true there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, for the sake of argument-then he plays out the logical conclusions of that belief.”<sup>7</sup>

## Transition

If the dead are in fact not raised, then [verses 12-13](#), the [first consequence](#) is that...

## Main Points

### I. Christ is still in the grave (15:12-13)

- There is an intrinsic connection between what happened to Jesus and what will happen to us. Like PB&J you can’t have one without the other. If the dead at some future point are raised to life, then Jesus Christ is the first to point to that reality. However, if there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, if people die and stay dead, then the same is true of Christ. He’s still rotting in the grave.
- Listen to how Paul starts his argument in [verses 12-13](#). *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* Right away Paul reminds the Corinthians the common story among all Christians everywhere is

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<sup>5</sup> Fee, p 715.

<sup>6</sup> Wallace, p. 690.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, p. 690.

that Christ did in fact rise to new life after his crucifixion. *It is preached that Christ has been raised.* In other words, Paul says, right now Christians are preaching this stuff, that Christ has been raised. It's what Paul preached. It's what the other apostles preached. It's what we believe now. And Paul's already reminded them of what was taught and handed down. *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* This is what Christians believe and announce to the world, that Christ is risen.

- And so the question comes, if that's what is preached and believed, that Christ rose from the dead, how in the world can some say that there is no such thing as a general resurrection from the dead? *Verse 12, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* Paul argues, if you really believe that, that the dead do not rise, then here's the repercussion of your belief. *And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* If people die and once they die, they stay dead, then Christ is still dead too. Christ is still in the grave. There is a causal connection between Christ's resurrection and ours. In the words of [Gordon Fee](#), "to deny the resurrection of the dead is to deny the resurrection of the one who makes any and all resurrections possible."<sup>8</sup>
- You've all seen the toy with the steel balls hanging by wires in a row? You pull the first ball back and let it go and it hits the next ball in line, energy is transferred through the series of balls and the ball on the opposite end moves. The connection between what happens to Jesus and us is just like that. If he is raised to life, then his followers will also be raised to life. *20 As Paul says in verse 20, But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* He is the first of many. There is such a thing as a resurrection.
- The problem is as [John Stott](#) says, "We are always in danger of trivializing the gospel, of minimizing what God is able to do for us and in us. We speak of becoming a Christian as if it were no more than turning over a new leaf, making a few superficial adjustments to our usual pattern of behavior, and becoming a bit more religious. Then scratch the surface, crack the veneer, and behold! underneath we are still the same old pagan, unredeemed and unchanged. But no, becoming and being a Christian according to the New Testament is something much more radical than this. It is a decisive act of God. It is nothing less than a resurrection from the death of alienation and self-centeredness, and the beginning of a new and liberated life. In a word, the same God of supernatural power, who raised Jesus from physical death, can raise us from spiritual death. And we know he can raise *us* because we know he raised *him*."<sup>9</sup>
- Yes, the hope of Christians is that one day because of Christ's resurrection those who place their faith in His atoning sacrifice will somehow attain the resurrection of the dead. Glorified bodies. No sickness. No tears. No suffering. But if our lives aren't bleeding Jesus' resurrection power now, in life, we trivialize the resurrection. But because Christ has been raised to life we are called to newness of life now. *Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away*

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<sup>8</sup> Fee, p. 741.

<sup>9</sup> Stott, p. 83.

*with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

- Some of you by virtue of the fact that you are still enslaved to same sins month after month year after year are living, practically speaking, as if Christ is still in the grave. The pornography addiction persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. The stealing persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. The anger persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. The alcoholism persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. The gossip persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. The plagiarism persists because practically speaking Christ is still in the grave. It's possible to mouth the words "I believe in Christ's resurrection" and deny the workings of that resurrection power in your day to day life. Christ died and rose to set you free. Drop that rock in the pond of your life and let the ripples wash over every part of you. Pray Paul's prayer in Philippians 3:10 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection* and he will set you free.

### Transition

Look at [verses 14-16](#) and the [second consequence](#) of Paul's hypothetical argument that there's no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. Remember, he's arguing to prove a point, to prove the opposite, that there is such a thing as a resurrection of the dead. If it's true that there is no resurrection of the dead, then...

## II. Christianity is a sham (15:14-16)

- The web site [snopes.com](#) reports that in 1928 Coca-Cola first tried to penetrate the Chinese market. Initially they had no official name for the soft drink in Mandarin. They needed to find four Chinese characters that approximated the sounds "ko-ka-ko-la." While searching for the right characters Chinese shopkeepers went ahead and created signs that combined characters to create the sound "ko-ka-ko-la." Problem was they did so with no thought as to the meaning. The character for wax, pronounced "la," was used in many signs resulting in strings that sounded like "ko-ka-ko-la" when pronounced but conveyed nonsensical meanings such as "female horse fastened with wax," "wax-flattened mare," or "bite the wax tadpole."
- If Christ is still in the grave then Christianity is a bite the wax tadpole religion. It makes no sense. If Christ has not been raised then Christianity is nonsensical. It's a sham, a hoax, and a lie. We'd be better off as Buddhists.
- Paul's slippery slope argument starting in [verse 14](#) is pretty easy to follow. *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.* If Christ has not been raised, then the repercussions are immense. Preaching about the cross and resurrection is pointless. So too is the Christian faith. If you take away the resurrection there's is nothing left, the faith is empty. It's devoid of meaning. It'd be like carrying around a present telling everyone of the great gift inside when in actuality all there is an empty box.
- But more than that if Christ is still in the grave, Christians are liars, *false witnesses*. Why? Because Christians from the very beginning have testified that that Christ has in fact risen

from the grave. What I've given my life to makes me the biggest fool here and the Christian faith is useless, empty, without meaning if there is no resurrection. If Christ hasn't been raised from the dead then all Christians are liars—of which I'm a chief liar. If Christ is still in the grave then Christianity is nothing more than a lie carried out in God's name.<sup>10</sup>

- The problem is that the resurrection is true and still a lot of people think Christianity is a sham and Christians are liars. But what if? What if Christ really did rise from the grave? What if God intervened in history through the resurrection? If the resurrection didn't happen you have nothing to worry about—all Christians are liars. But what if it's true? What if Jesus' words are true? *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."* If you doubt do what the philosophers in Acts 17:32 did. *When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some sneered, but others said "we want to hear you again on this subject."* Keep questioning and Jesus will prove himself to you. Guaranteed. Because he is risen.

### Transition

Finally, let's look at the [third consequence](#) of Paul's hypothetical argument. If there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead then, [verses 17-19](#)...

### III. There is no forgiveness of sins (15:17-19)

- If Christ is still in the grave, then the greatest hope of Christianity—the forgiveness of sins—is an illusion. Look at [verses 17-19](#). *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*
- The testimony of the bible is that Jesus linked his death to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says in Matthew 26:28 *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* His death, the spilling of his blood atones for our sins. His blood for our sins. A good deal if you ask me. But if Christ has not been raised then this hope of forgiveness through Christ's blood is a waste—of his blood and our hope. If there is no resurrection then Christ hasn't been raised and our sins haven't been atoned for. In other words, if Christ has not been raised from the dead then believing that he did rise from the dead is an exercise in futility. It's aimless. Pointless. Pathetic.
- But more than that. *If Christ has not been raised death wins.* And if death wins then those who have professed faith in Christ and hoped in a lie and then have died are lost as the text says. There's no hope either for those who have died, or for us who are still living.
- To sum everything up Paul says in [verse 19](#) if in this life our hope is in Christ then we are to be pitied. *If only for this life, we hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.* If there is no resurrection of the dead then Christians are the most pitiable creatures this world has ever seen. Believing a pitiable lie. Professing a pitiable lie. Living a pitiable lie. Hoping in a pitiable lie. That is, if Christ did not rise from the grave.
- *But praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5*

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<sup>10</sup> Fee, p. 742.

*who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*<sup>11</sup> He is the God of the living not of the dead; therefore we hope. And our hope is not in vain.

## **Conclusion**

- So what now? We've followed Paul's "what if" arguments through to the end. Paul, you've got us. We believe in the resurrection of the dead. We believe in Christ's resurrection. So what. Look ahead to [verse 58](#). In the context of this discussion of the resurrection of Christ Paul gives these concluding words to the Corinthians. The ethical implications of the resurrection mean something for us here and now. *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* Because Christ has been raised we are called to a life of steadfast labor in Christ's name. "At the heart of Christianity, what we find is neither a philosophy nor a system of morality, but a gospel: good news."<sup>12</sup> And so we labor. We toil. With much love we pour ourselves out to make this good news known. *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried. He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* He is alive. Press on in that good work. Let's pray.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 1:3-5

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, in an interview with *Trinity* magazine Kevin Vanhoozer, "Experience the Drama," *Trinity* magazine (Spring 2006), p. 19-21.