

# THE NECESSITY OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:12–19

Key Verse: 15:12

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

What do you think about the resurrection of the body? Honestly, it's not on our minds very often. It's hardly mentioned in churches or Bible studies. Many are left to think about it based on what society or the media tell us. People adopt a hodgepodge of ideas. Some believe that at death the body simply disintegrates. Others believe in reincarnation, or that someday we'll all merge into some sort of eternal light. But in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul insists on God's promise that he's going to give all who believe resurrection bodies. How can we believe this promise of God? And why should we? Easter is a good time to really learn about it. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

In the first part of this chapter Paul states the gospel so simply: Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day (3,4). At first, such a gospel may not seem so special—people long ago said somebody died and rose again. Random. Kind of strange. But actually this gospel is the best news that ever happened in human history. In this gospel God gives people the forgiveness of sins (Mt26:28), inner healing (1Pe2:24), the power to change (Ro6:4), and a living hope in heaven (1Pe1:3–4). It's the grace of God! It's free! It's real! It's still the best news to all people all over the world, no matter who we are.

Paul says twice that this gospel happened “in accordance with the Scriptures.” In their sacred writings over many centuries all the prophets predicted that the Messiah would die and rise again. They were searching and inquiring carefully into “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (1Pe1:10–11; Eph3:9). And at long last Jesus came and did it—he actually died and rose again, according to God's definite plan (Ac2:23; 4:28). It was God who made it happen; it was God who fulfilled all those prophecies in the Scriptures exactly. So the gospel of Christ came from God himself. What's more, this gospel is not just a good idea or a theory or philosophy; it's a historic fact.

To many, resurrection from the dead may sound like a sci-fi movie. But Paul goes on to list eyewitnesses. These different people, at different times and places, all

encountered this same Risen Christ (5–7). So it can't be a made-up story. Their testimonies, put together, give even stronger proof that the gospel of Christ is real. Finally, Paul's own change, from a persecutor of the church to an apostle by the grace of God, proves without a shadow of a doubt that it's true (8–10). What could possibly change such a self-righteous man into a man of God's grace but the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection?

Now Paul gets to his point. There was a problem in the Corinthian church. Read verse 12. Some were denying that there is such a thing as being raised from the dead. Many have guessed why they were saying so. But Corinth, being in Greece, was no doubt heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. The Greeks emphasized the duality of human beings, body and soul. They thought the human body is like a prison for the soul, when at death it's finally released. Who would want such a weak, decaying body to be raised again?

Through the gospel these Corinthian Christians had experienced the powerful work of the Holy Spirit within them (1Co2:4,10–15; 12:7–13). They seemed to have thought that this is what it means to be "raised" with Christ—raised in the Spirit. They didn't think they needed a resurrected body. It may seem like a small matter. Why not just let them believe what they want? But to Paul, God's promise to give us a resurrection body is a crucial part of the gospel. It's completely unacceptable to take out our hope of the resurrection of the body.

Today people pick and choose from here and there what they want to believe. It's fashionable to believe in compassion or social justice. But it's never been fashionable to repent or believe God will punish the world for its wickedness. Regardless of what people say, the gospel is not like a buffet where you can take whatever you like and leave the rest. The gospel message in all its aspects is from God. It's all his truth. And it's all interrelated and part of God's divine plan. So Paul goes on in verses 13–19 to show how the resurrection of our bodies is directly related to the resurrection of Christ and the good news of God himself.

In these verses Paul uses logic to persuade them. Read verse 13. "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." These people hadn't thought things through. They were saying the resurrection of the body is impossible, but it had never occurred to them to deny the resurrection of Christ himself; they did believe *that*. So Paul guides them to think for a minute about what the world would be like if Christ had not been raised. If that really *were* true, death would rule over this world absolutely. Nobody would ever be raised from the dead. Death has always made the world seem meaningless. In fact, it makes life seem absurd. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* there's the

famously angry death lament: “Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury Signifying nothing” (Act 5, Scene 5, Lines 22-28). Philosophers have tried to help people come to terms with such devastating meaninglessness. None of them provide answers. Their words are mere tranquilizers that don’t ever solve the problem. Without Christ’s resurrection, this world is indeed bleak and totally depressing.

Paul goes on. Read verse 14. “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” In Greek the words “in vain” are one word: “empty.” Paul stakes all of Christianity on the resurrection of Christ. Without it, all preaching and all believing are empty. We’ve all probably heard our share of empty preaching. But preaching based on the resurrection of Christ is definitely not empty. When Peter preached Christ’s resurrection, people were cut to the heart, and three thousand souls were converted (Ac2:31–41). When Paul preached the resurrection, many begged to hear more and began to follow him and Barnabas (Ac13:30–43). Through his gospel preaching many became disciples (Ac14:21). His gospel preaching demonstrated the power of the cross of Christ (1Co1:17–18), the power of the Spirit, the power of God (1Co2:4–5). It’s not empty preaching because it’s based on the resurrection of Christ, which is very real.

We’ve all probably also had a run in with “empty” faith. Such faith is mere information or head knowledge. Empty faith produces no influence, no action, no fruit. We can believe many things which seem to be Christian, but without faith in the resurrection, it all turns out to be empty. In verse 10, when Paul writes that God’s grace to him was not “in vain,” he uses this same word “empty.” Faith in the resurrection of Christ is never empty, because through it we experience the power of the grace of God, which always enlivens us to start working hard for God.

Next, Paul turns from our preaching and our faith to who God is. Read verse 15. “We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.” The point is not just that the apostles and all Christians would be liars, but would be especially guilty of misrepresenting God. Who is God? He’s God Almighty, who created the heavens and earth (Ge1:1). Lawless men crucified and killed Jesus, but it was not possible for him to be held by death because of the reality of Almighty God (Ac2:23–24). Paul writes elsewhere that he’s the God “who gives life to the dead” (Ro4:17b). God Almighty cannot be defeated by death. God Almighty is the God of hope. Faith in the resurrection of Christ, and in our bodily resurrection, is rooted in the very nature of who God is.

To further emphasize the necessity of the resurrection, Paul repeats the truth that if our bodies can't be raised, then Christ wasn't raised, either. Then he goes on to warn us of another consequence. Read verse 17. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." In Paul's theology, the resurrection of Christ gives us a blessed assurance. Our God has atoned for all our sins. Our God has forgiven all our sins. Our God can deliver us from all our sins. Through the resurrection of Christ God broke sin's grip on our souls. Praise God! But without Christ's resurrection, we're still enslaved in our sins.

There's another tragic result. Read verse 18. "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." (FLIP SLIDE) "Fallen asleep in Christ" is a euphemism for death. Our Lord Jesus referred to death this way (Mt9:24), and so did Paul (1Co15:51). This sleep in Christ is a peaceful state, where death has no hold on us. And someday, according to God's promise, our Lord Jesus Christ will return to this world to wake us up. The prophet Daniel wrote: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake..." (Da12:2a). What a beautiful image of our Good Shepherd Jesus, who's going to come someday to wake us up so gently and take us to be with him! But without his resurrection, all those who held onto this promise and died have just perished, literally meaning they were "destroyed."

Paul concludes. Read verse 19. "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Why does he say this? He's talking about our lifestyle as Christians. When we believe in Christ's resurrection, we're ready to suffer and sacrifice for him. Humanly speaking Paul was such an outstanding person. But, for Christ's sake, he had experienced hunger and thirst, poor clothing, homelessness, and hard work with his own hands. He was reviled, persecuted, and slandered, treated as the scum of the world, the refuse of all things (1Co4:11-13). After all that, he wrote, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Php3:8,10-11). But if there's no such thing as the resurrection of the body, all Paul's sacrifice and sufferings were for nothing. And all who still follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, who deny themselves, take up their own cross and obey God's will unto death, look pitiful without the hope of the resurrection. Just as our Righteous God did not abandon his Holy One to the grave (Ac2:27,31), so he will never forget all those who suffered for him (Rev6:10).

So what is Paul telling us in this passage? He's proclaiming the absolute necessity of the resurrection of the body, based on the resurrection of Christ. With this resurrection

hope we see the world not as meaningless or absurd, but as a place where God will surely reveal his glory. With this resurrection hope, our preaching and our faith are powerful and effective. With this resurrection hope, we proclaim the reality of God Almighty, the God of hope. With this resurrection hope, we gain the power to come out of our sins. With this resurrection hope, we have hope for all who've fallen asleep in Christ. With this resurrection hope, we suffer for our Lord Jesus boldly and unashamed. May God grant each of us his promise of the resurrection of our body through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.