

“I DIE EVERY DAY!”

1 Corinthians 15:29–34

Key Verse: 15:31

“I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!”

What kind of life would you like to have? Do you love thrills and adventures? Or do you just want some peace and quiet? Certain folks thrive on conflict, others avoid it like the plague. Our natural impulse is self-preservation. We'd all like to make our lives as safe and comfortable as possible. In today's passage Apostle Paul is presenting us with two alternatives: a life of enjoying, or a life of suffering. And he's saying that believing the resurrection leads to the latter kind. Why is that? Why is it that resurrection faith leads us to suffer daily? No wonder there's no mad rush to believe it! Can't we have it all? All the good things of this world, *and* the promise of the resurrection? Does it have to be so black and white? Paul's words today challenge us to our core, our entire way of living. He's telling us that resurrection faith means not just memorizing the doctrine, but living the lifestyle, making real changes. Today let's reflect on what “I die every day” means to us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words.

Look at verse 29. “Otherwise, 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?” Here Paul returns to the “what ifs” he was using earlier (12–19) and mentions an obscure practice. It's only here in the Bible, and there are literally hundreds of interpretations of what it means. One explanation seems most sensible. In Paul's time, some people knew of family members who believed in Jesus and died, and they really wanted to see these loved ones again. When they heard about the resurrection of Jesus, and that if they repented and believed in him, they'd be reunited with their loved ones, they decided to get baptized. Paul doesn't say this is good or bad; he's just saying that if the resurrection were not true, there would be no point to this practice.

Look at verse 30. “Why are we in danger every hour?” What's Paul talking about now? While spreading the good news of Jesus to new areas and peoples, he and his co-workers were facing all kinds of threatening situations: the dangers of journeys, rivers and robbers, the dangers of angry Jews and angry Gentiles, the dangers in the cities and the dangers in the wilderness, the danger at sea and even dangers in the church from false brothers (2Co11:26). So intense! We may not be facing so many problems, but whenever

we share the gospel, there's usually some kind of danger. Why? Because the devil really doesn't like us to do it. And if the resurrection isn't true, why expose ourselves to such risks?

Read verse 31. "I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!" What an odd expression! How can this be our key verse? What is Paul "protesting"? Literally the Greek word means to "swear." In this context it's interpreted as "protest" because Paul is so furiously refuting those who deny the resurrection. But how is Paul's "protest" related to his "pride" in the Corinthian Christians? He's proud of them because, as he said in verse 1, they had received the gospel and were standing in it. And now he's protesting because this denial of the resurrection is pulling them away from their gospel faith. So, in this chapter, in presenting all the implications of the resurrection, Paul is no armchair theologian speculating on all kinds of abstractions. He's engaged in a fierce struggle for the souls of his brothers. The most important phrase in verse 31 is the last one: "I die every day!" There's an exclamation point. And in English, by being placed at the end of the sentence, it's emphasized the most. This phrase pops out of the passage like a neon sign.

Paul gives an example. Look at verse 32a. "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?" This reference is also a bit unfamiliar, and it might refer to several things. Most likely, it's about Paul's initial ministry in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19. In that chapter, an enraged crowd starts chanting for hours and looking for somebody to kill—hence the reference to the "beasts." And how did things come to that? It's because through Paul's ministry, people began repenting of their idolatrous materialism, so much so that the city's silversmiths felt threatened they'd go out of business. What's more, the gospel message confronted the city's pride in its world-famous goddess and temple of Artemis. Paul courageously challenged the people's root problem, idolatry and materialism, out of real love for them. It almost got him killed. His courage to do this came from his resurrection faith.

But Paul is not just talking about his own heroic exploits and extreme lifestyle as a pioneering missionary. When he writes, "I die every day," he's referring to a lifestyle that the Bible says all believers are called to follow. In what respects do these words actually apply to us? And how are they related to having real resurrection faith?

First, die to our sinful nature. The Bible challenges all those who belong to Christ to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal5:24). If we really believe Christ is risen, we'll do it. It means to crucify our sinful nature, and especially our pride. In this letter Paul repeatedly says we need to die to our boasting in people or in ourselves (1Co1:28–31;

3:21; 4:7). Like Paul, in dying to our sinful nature daily, we need to learn to boast only in the cross of Christ (Gal6:14a).

Second, die to the world. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul says that to die every day means to die to the world. It means to die to worldly standards and to worldly ways of thinking about people (1Co1:26–28). It means to die to worldly wisdom (1Co3:19). It means to die to trying to use the world to the full (1Co7:31). It means to die to being anxious about worldly things (1Co7:33–34). Basically, it means to die to my love of the world (1Jn2:15–17). We may think we’re pretty decent Christians, but the world so easily steals our minds and hearts, and we’re not even aware of it. The struggle is real. So Paul writes: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col3:1–2).

Third, die to self for the gospel. To understand Paul’s words, “I die every day!” we need to go back to the words of our Lord Jesus. He said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk9:23). The cross wasn’t just at the end of his life; it was his lifestyle. During his ministry our Lord Jesus denied himself and took up his cross daily. He explained elsewhere, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn6:38). Being fully human, he had his own will, and once he had a tremendous struggle to surrender to God’s, even to the point that “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Lk22:41–44). Living in such submission to God’s will brought misunderstanding and hostility from those who didn’t want to repent. Romans 15:3 says, “For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.’” “Reproach” means being criticized, verbally abused and insulted. Our Lord Jesus “endured from sinners such opposition against himself” (Heb12:3). But he “endured the cross, despising the shame” because he had the joy of the resurrection set before him. In other words, he was doing it all for the gospel. This is why he’s “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb12:2).

Jesus made such dying to oneself a requirement for all who believe. He said in Mark 8:35: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” His words “loses his life” are essentially the same as Paul’s word “die.” But it’s not just suffering, sacrificing or dying for its own sake; it’s dying for a purpose. What’s the purpose? Our Lord Jesus calls us to lose our lives *for his sake, for the gospel’s sake*. Why would anybody actually live for Christ’s sake, for the sake of the gospel? 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, “...and he died for all, that those who live might no

longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2Co5:15). It was for our sake that our Lord Jesus Christ died and was raised. As Paul puts it elsewhere, he “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal2:20). In light of what Jesus did for us, in light of such great love, which is so real, we’re all called to die to a self-centered life, a life centered on this world, and to start living for him, start really loving him in return.

There are other ways we die to self out of love for Jesus. Paul illustrates it elsewhere in this letter through his own example. He died to using his own rights, or to anything that would hinder the gospel of Christ (1Co9:12). He died to self in order to become a slave to all, in order to gain more people; he died to self to become all things to all people (1Co9:19–23). He told us all to suffer with all the parts of the body of Christ that suffer (1Co12:26). He even said in Colossians 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...” Basically Paul *embraced* any and all suffering, if only it could build up the precious body of Christ. Do we have such a spirit?

In 2 Corinthians 4:8–12 he wrote: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.” To die every day means to always be carrying in our body the death of Jesus, always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake. What a life! It’s so that “the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” It’s only through such dying that the resurrection of Jesus can be revealed in and through us, and bring life to others.

And what’s the alternative? Read verse 32b. “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” Sounds fun, but it’s so despairing. Such a nihilistic, pleasure-seeking motto is nothing new; it’s been around for thousands of years. Paul says it’s the life we *should* choose if there’s no resurrection. But he suddenly counters it, with another famous motto. Read verse 33. “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” Here, “bad company” refers to those with no resurrection faith. Their “company” is especially in conversation. They don’t speak based on resurrection faith, but with cynicism, sarcasm and ungodly talk. So resurrection faith affects even our speech. Paul ends with an even stronger rebuke. Read verse 34. “Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.” “Wake up!” We all really need to hear this. Wake up from indulging in our sinful nature. Wake up from loving the world. Wake up from living for self. Wake up from being lulled into unbelief. Spiritually we can be in a drunken stupor and living in such a

shameful state. Wake up, stop sinning, and know God. This is what resurrection faith really means. May God help us embrace Paul's words, "I die every day!"