

Imagine No Resurrection – 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Introduction - How important is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead? Paul makes clear that it is very important. He will argue that to deny the resurrection of the dead is to miss the point of the Gospel and the hope for all faithful Christian living today. Jesus Christ did not die and go off to heaven so that one day we will die and go off to heaven. Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead so that we might die in Christ and be raised to new life in Him and so that one day, death itself, even our death, will be fully vindicated by Christ in our bodily resurrection from the dead. Later in this chapter, Paul will give the positive argument for the resurrection. In these verses (12-19), he reveals the negative implications of imagining a world with no hope of resurrection.

No Resurrection and Faith (vv12-14) – Chapter 15 begins with a declaration of the gospel which Paul and all of the apostles preached (v1, v11), and it included the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus, witnessed by many who could still give testimony (vv4-8). But some in Corinth were preaching that there was no future hope of our resurrection (v12). The pagan world denied any claim to a bodily resurrection. Pythagoreans held to a notion of the soul being released from the body at death. Plutarch saw the soul attaining the realm of the gods by freeing itself from the attachment of the senses. Others taught that the dead were simply non-existent. Romans believed that their emperors were promoted to a divine rank or stature after their death, but there was no body associated with it. But the apostles preached a risen Christ and the resurrection of the dead (i.e. Acts 4:1-2).

With v13, Paul accepts their premise and sings along with John Lennon (sort of) – “imagine there’s no resurrection, it’s easy if you try...” That means that no one will ever rise from the dead which means that not even Christ has been raised. When you deny the resurrection of the dead you necessarily deny the resurrection of the One who makes any resurrection possible. And (v14) if Jesus was not raised from the dead then the preaching of all the apostles is empty and any faith we might have is useless. Jesus cannot be the author of salvation to others if He did not vanquish death Himself. Notice the close identification between Christ and His people. If there is no future resurrection of the dead in Christ, then Christ has not been raised. They are inseparable; the two go together. And if there is no resurrection, your faith (i.e. “*believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead*” – Rom 10:9-10) is flat out wrong and empty.

No Resurrection and Truth (vv15-16) – Not only that, the whole Gospel proclamation is made by a bunch of liars. Jesus and His apostles preached the resurrection from the dead – His (Luke 24:46) as well as His people, for He is the firstfruits of a future resurrection (v20, 22-23, Col 1:18, Rev 1:5). It is absurd to think of Jesus or the Bible as having anything worth believing, trusting, or following if it turns out that the main characters and authors were false teachers. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus is not the Truth and we are left with Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). You cannot honestly say Jesus was a good teacher of ethical values for life, a good spiritual guru, or one of many faiths worth following if He was a liar. If there is no resurrection of the dead then there is no truth – or at least no way of finding truth. This is what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion (Rom 1:3-4, Acts 4:10-12).

No Resurrection and Time & Matter (vv17-19) – If Christ is still in the grave, then your faith is futile (v17) and you are still in your sins. It doesn’t matter what you believe. Christ has not brought you to the Father because He is not with the Father. You cannot enjoy resurrection life as Paul had proclaimed (1 Cor 6:11) because you are still in your sins. To deny your future resurrection has the effect of denying your past forgiveness. Our justification and sanctification are bound together with Jesus’ resurrection (Rom 4:25, 5:10-11). In v18 it goes the other way: to deny the past resurrection of Christ in effect denies any hope for resurrection of all those who have already died in Christ, for they died in their sins, unjustified and without hope. Notice Paul leaves no room for speculation of their souls being freed unto some Elysium haze – not if Christ is not risen. They have perished (they are “ruined,” “destroyed”). Finally, in v19, if we have believed in a future that is not to come and all there is consists this life, this world, this story until we die, then Christianity, taking up your cross, denying yourself, fighting the flesh, all of it – is ludicrous. We are of all men the most pitiable.

The logic of these verses is seen in Romans 8, especially 8:18. If there is not a future glory being produced through our sufferings, then why bother? So also, 2 Cor 4:17, “*our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” - makes absolutely no sense. All of creation groans, waiting for the story of the Fall to make sense, for true mercy and justice to be revealed in the resurrected world (Rom 8:18-25). But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then time and matter have no meaning, no purpose, no future.

Imagine... - Did you ever think the resurrection was so important? Faith, truth, time and matter all depend on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Christ didn't rise from the dead, the whole of the Christian faith, from Genesis to Revelation, comes crashing down, and we are lost in our sins and a meaningless life. Our lives are bound up in time, but if there is no resurrection, the shot-clock is running down and pretending it matters doesn't help. There will be no future. And if there is no resurrection, then matter doesn't matter, created reality becomes a wisp of nothing. And the rest of this chapter will deal with all of this.

What if... you began to see that time is not slipping away. What if you instead saw that as you move closer to the resurrection you move closer and closer to the completion of what you and everything else was meant for - and that every hour, every day, every circumstance, were just steps towards life as God intends and promises for you.

Dave Hatcher - July 28, 2019

Notes for Little Saints

From the Nicene Creed (which you recited earlier in the service) -

*“and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.”*

Paul is talking about the resurrection all through Chapter 15 and we are taking it one little part at a time. In this section he shows how awful it would be if there were no resurrection to hope in.

If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is _____ and your faith is also _____. - verse 14.

If the dead will not be raised, then the apostles are false _____. - v15.

If Christ is not risen, you are still lost in your _____. - v17.

Finally, he says that if Christ is not risen, if there is no future resurrection for us, and all we have is this life to hope in, then we are the most _____. - v19.

But remember what Paul wrote in vv3-8. Christ was raised from the dead and so there will be a final resurrection from the dead and it will be wonderful for all who are in Christ.