

What If There Is No Bodily Resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Introduction: The doctrine of the resurrection of the body sets Christianity apart from philosophies and religions that hold a low view and give little value to the body. This would include Platoism, naturalistic materialism, Buddhism and Hinduism just to name a few. Of course, the linchpin of the Christian faith is the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. No resurrection, no Christianity.

What makes Christianity so different and so distinct is not just the teaching of Jesus, or the life of Jesus, or even the death of Jesus. What makes Christianity so different is a simple moment in time – maybe even less than a moment. It may be even a period of time that cannot be measured because what happened in that infinitesimally small period of time was something that had never happened before in history and has never happened since – a man was permanently and eternally raised from the dead in a body that could never die again. In that moment Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, as 1 Corinthians 15 says, in an incorruptible, immortal, eternal, heavenly body that is impervious to death. This truth is the non-negotiable foundation of Christianity.

But, what if the resurrection of Jesus never happened? What if the body of Jesus was truly discovered today in a grave in Palestine? What if Jesus Christ has not

been raised from the dead and there is no resurrection of the dead for anyone?

There were people in the Corinthians church that were questioning Jesus' resurrection. They, probably influenced by Platonic philosophy, questioned the idea of resurrection all together. Paul speaks directly and powerfully to this: if there is no resurrection and therefore Christ has not been raised, the results are truly catastrophic for both the church and the world. There is no gospel! There is no future hope. We are still dead in our sins.

I. If there is no bodily resurrection then Christ is not risen 15:12-13, 16

Paul begins this chapter with his recitation of the Gospel because the Gospel of Christianity and the Christianity of the Gospel have one thing in common: both are meaningless apart from the resurrection of Jesus. Both the general resurrection of believers and the particular resurrection of Jesus are joined at the hip and inextricably linked. "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, 'There is no resurrection of the dead'? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." (15:12-13, also v. 16).

There were those in the church at Corinth who had adopted the thinking of many in the Graeco-Roman world that the soul is immortal, but once the body dies it stays dead forever. (Garland, *BECNT*, 700). Apparently, they wanted to hold to the resurrection of Jesus in particular but not the resurrection of

believers in general. Paul categorically denies that possibility. You cannot say that believers will not be raised from the dead, but that Christ has been raised from the dead. Why? Because we are linked with Christ and His destiny is our destiny. Union with Christ means we share all that is His including His resurrection. It is non-sensical and illogical to affirm Christ's resurrection but deny ours.

II. If there is no bodily resurrection then preaching is in vain 15:14

In verse 14 Paul lays out the consequences of a dead Jesus – a dead Jesus who is still in the tomb. Conditional sentences throughout this section begin with “if” (*eide*), the condition being an assumed fact. That is, if one thing is true then the conclusion must be true (Mare & Harris, *EBC*, 111). So the first conclusion is this, “and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain” (15:14).

A dead Jesus affects not just the messenger, but the message. If Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then preachers of the gospel are wasting their time preaching the gospel. Preaching in in vain, to no effect, it has no power. Schreiner writes, “The implications of Christ has not been raised are massive, and Paul wants the Corinthians to see how radically and completely the gospel is undercut by such a claim...if Christ is not risen, what Paul preaches is useless” (p. 309).

III. If there is no bodily resurrection then faith in Christ is futile 15:14, 17

Twice Paul tells us our faith is futile or in vain if Jesus is not raised from the dead. Without a risen Savior no sermon regardless of how beautiful, how oratorical, how logical, or how stimulating is really worth a thing. The message is “vain” which literally means “empty,” and our faith in the message is vain. If Jesus Christ is dead not even the great Apostle Paul had anything worth saying to anyone about his life or the next one. There was nothing worth hearing. There was nothing worth believing. *The Message* has a colorful paraphrase, “face it – if there’s no resurrection for Christ, everything we’ve told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you’ve staked your life on is smoke and mirrors.”

IV. If there is no bodily resurrection then we are false witnesses 15:15-16

Paul moves from “the pulpit to the pew,” from “the pastor to the people.” His words are for every Christian. “Moreover, we are found to be false witnesses about God (*ESV*, “misrepresenting God”), because we have testified wrongly about God that he raised up Christ-whom he did not raise up, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised” (15:15-16).

The word for “false witness” is actually a combination of two Greek words. The first word is the word “pseudo” which means “false.” A pseudo-intellectual is

someone who thinks he is smart when he really is not. A pseudonym is a false name. The other half of that word gives us the English word “martyr.”

Originally, the word means “witness.” Simply put, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then those of us who are witnesses of the Gospel, who are sharing the Gospel, who are proclaiming the Gospel, are simply liars. We are guilty of spiritual perjury of the most serious sort.

In fact, Paul said that if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then Jesus Himself would be a liar, because he is the one who said repeatedly, he would be raised from the dead. If Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, once again Christianity collapses like the Twin Towers of 9/11. We misrepresent God and we are proclaiming a lie.

In verse 16, Paul again reiterates the only conclusion we can draw. If there is no bodily resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised. You cannot have your feet in both worlds. If you believe in the particular resurrection of Jesus, you must believe in the general resurrection of believers. The two are a package deal.

V. If there is no bodily resurrection then we are still in our sins 15:17

A denial and rejection of the bodily resurrection has serious consequences.

Faith is useless. And, you are still an unforgiven sinner. If Jesus is still in the tomb and still dead and buried it strikes a deathblow to the very concept of

faith. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless (*ESV*, “futile”)...(15:17a). We live in a world today where most people say it doesn’t really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief. This statement shows just how foolish that is because if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead our faith is useless, worthless, of no value.

The truth of the matter is the only Jesus that is worthy of our faith is a resurrected Jesus. The Jesus that makes it worthwhile to live a life of faith is a resurrected Jesus. That is the foundation of our faith, gives feet to our faith, replaces fear with faith. Merritt says, “It is foolish to place your faith in anyone regardless of the quality of their life, the brilliance of their teaching, or the quality of their example if they are still dead.”

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8 that we are “saved by grace through faith...” (Eph. 2:8). However, if there is no resurrected Jesus faith is useless and you are still dead in your sins. If Christ is not the resurrected Savior, then sin is sovereign, not Him. Sin wins. Salvation is an illusion. If Jesus is still physically dead, we are still spiritually dead. Sin is still a chain that binds us, a load that burdens us, and a hammer that breaks us.

VI. If there is no bodily resurrection then our loved ones have perished 15:18

“Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished” (15:18). A dead Jesus not only provides no hope for those of us who are living, he provides

no hope for those who have died (“fallen asleep). They have also “perished.” They have no existence beyond the grave.

The verb Paul uses here for “perished” is *apollymi*. It addresses not just physical death, it also addresses spiritual death, a final death, a sleep from which no one ever wakes up, eternal eschatological destruction (Schreiner, *TNTC*, 310). Death still has its sting; the grave still has its victory, if Christ is not raised. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, there is no hope now and there is no heaven later. Our loved ones are lost, and hopelessly so and someday the same will be true for us too.

VII. If there is no bodily resurrection we are to be pitied 15:19

Not only does a dead Jesus kill any hope for life beyond this life, it kills any hope of any kind for any meaningful life in this life. “If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone” (15:19). It might be argued that the Christian life is worth living on its own merits, and that obviously this world would indeed be a better place if everyone were to live the Christian life the way the Word of God teaches. However, any advantage is short-lived, temporal. At the end of the day, it is futile. Schreiner draws this devastating conclusion, “Paul does not salute the nobility and sacrifice of Christians even if their faith is not true. Instead, if Christ was not

crucified and is not risen for their sins, believers have wasted their lives in believing fables” (Schreiner, *TNTC*, 310). We are pitiful, pathetic, fools who believed, lived, and died for a fable, a mirage. But, praise God, here comes verse 20, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Conclusion: I have met professors and people who do not believe in the literal, physical, resurrection of Jesus. Actually, they are the ones to be pitied. Christ is not dead. The empty tomb says so. The Bible says so. Jesus said so. It is so! That is the true story of the whole world. Believe it. Proclaim it. Live in its hope. It is the truth.