



**1 Cor. 15:12-20**  
**If Christ Is Not Risen...**

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

This morning we spoke of the problem of individual Christians being led astray from the narrow path that leads to salvation into the broad path that leads to destruction, we spoke of how sometimes it was a desire to avoid suffering and difficulty that caused that, but other times it was just the desire not to be strange or weird in the eyes of the world anymore.

Well, the fact is that it isn't just individual Christians who have that problem of peer pressure and wanting to fit in with the world, the church institutionally does as well. And there is always pressure in every time to alter the message of the Gospel to make it more compatible with the culture that you are in. Paul had to deal with this problem in the Galatian church, where a Jewish cultural influence caused the Galatian churches to begin making becoming Jews and keeping the Mosaic law part of the Gospel. What they were doing was caving in to the presumptions of the dominant Pharasaic culture, but in so doing they sold out the gospel of grace and returned men to a system of works-based salvation that could not save. Therefore Paul condemned this "other Gospel" in the sharpest possible terms, calling the Galatians foolish to go after it.

Now the Pharasaic Judaism that so influenced the Galatian church was not the problem for the Corinthian church, their problem was being submerged in a Greek culture which was driven by Greek dualistic philosophy. Greeks saw the material world as evil, and the spiritual world of the forms as pure and perfect, the soul therefore was good and perfect, but during its time in the body it was trapped in a material prison and degraded by the desires of the flesh. They believed therefore that death freed the soul from that degraded prison-house and allowed it to return to its original purity. Therefore the idea of resurrection or in the Greek *anastasis* was awful to them. The very word *anastasis* meant to rise or stand again, it implied that our dead bodies would rise up again and our souls return to them. Nothing could be worse than that concept, so in preaching the Gospel, men like Paul were cutting across the grain of the culture, rubbing people the wrong way, saying something strange or weird in their ears.

So it is not surprising that the Corinthian church seems to have comparatively quickly started to change this message. Some in the church, according to verse 12 were beginning to teach, **“The dead don’t rise again”** a message I’m sure they thought would be more compatible with their culture. **“Sure maybe Christ rose again, because he was after all the Son of God, but He was the only one. We will never have to return to our physical bodies.”** No doubt they thought that this would make the preaching of the gospel much easier. The removed from the gospel a bitter pill for Greeks to swallow, and added something pleasant to their ears. This is what some have called the ***Mary Poppins approach to Gospel preaching*** from the Mary Poppins line, “a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.”

Many in the church today do the same thing, they change the gospel message in order to make it more palatable to the culture. Our culture doesn’t have the same Platonic philosophy as the Greeks, we don’t suffer as much from dualism. In fact just the opposite is true, our society errs on the side of materialism believing that the material world is all there is. All of this talk of miracles and things that go against the natural course of the material world like resurrection are what offend us. So in our Mary Poppins approach we take out the bitter pill of a literal resurrection of Christ, and replace it with a “spiritual resurrection” and say his literal resurrection was just a comforting myth. Men try to peddle a Christianity without miracles, and a gospel without a resurrection to the world. ***Look we aren’t strange we say, you’ll like this message, it’ll help you get through life.***

What if accept either of these revisions of the Gospel? What if Christ is not risen? How does that affect Christianity and Christians? Well Paul’s answer here is equally well suited to answer either revision, and his critique of either position is equally devastating.

In verse 13 Paul starts by pointing out the obvious; if there is no resurrection of the dead, if it is indeed impossible, then Christ is not risen. Yes, Jesus was the Son of God, but in the incarnation he took on our nature. He became truly and fully human as well. He became fully human as well as full Divine. And the resurrection that is preached in the bible is not a “spiritual resurrection” it is the reassumption of his human body. A glorified human body, but the same material human body that was put to death on the cross. If material bodies and spiritual souls are never reunited then Christ could not have risen, pure and simple.

Now that one truth of the bodily resurrection is like the first in a long line of dominos, the moment it falls the other great truths of the faith do as well.

The first is this, that the Gospel that Christ proclaimed, and that His apostles preached was summed up in verses 3 and 4: 1 Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

Jesus had said that the great proof of the truth of his preaching would be his rising again. Turn in your bibles to John 2:19 - ***19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.***

***22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.***

Therefore as Godet puts it, ***“Christ dead without a resurrection would be a condemned, not a justified, Christ. How could he justify others?”***

If Christ is not risen, then their preaching was fiction. It was empty, devoid of truth. And people who believed in it, had put their trust in a baseless, useless fable. If Christ was not resurrected He was not the Son of God, the whole Christian faith became a silly lie and if I can put it this way - ***believing in the Resurrection makes no more sense than believing in the Easter Bunny.***

Furthermore, if Christ is not risen, then His Apostles are *liars, because they knew better. They testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.* They were not sincere or helpful, they were a bunch of charlatans and by extension, I too am standing before you deluding you, peddling lies. Contrary to modern political theory, lies are not helpful and liars are no good to anyone.

Worse yet they are still in their sins! Christ had said ***John 8:24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."*** But if He did not rise He is not the Christ, and believing that He is changes nothing, they are still in their sins.

More monstrously those Christians who have died, closed their eyes believing they were on their way to heaven through Christ, and woke up in Hell.

For Christians death is not the all defeating adversary it is no more than sleep, but this is not true if they died in their sins.

***“There is a sharp contrast between the two terms: falling asleep in Christ and having perished. To close the eyes in the joy of salvation, to open them in the torments of perdition! The verb apolonto, “perished,” cannot designate annihilation, for it is explained by the preceding expression: “to be yet in sins”. It denotes a state of perdition in which the soul remains under the weight of divine condemnation.” - Godet***

If as Paul puts it, in verse 19 our faith is no more than a false hope only for this life, we Christians are the most to be pitied we are actually worse off than unbelievers -

We are twice losers in this world and the next, for we have lived for the hope to come. Undergone suffering for no reason. Paul has cried out in Romans 7:24 ***“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*** We have walked in a way that leads to a dead end. We have been “another-worlders” when there is no other world, sojourners going nowhere. We lost out in this world and the next, and the advice I gave you this morning is useless.

So you see the fact of the resurrection is an ***All or nothing*** issue for Paul and for us, this is the key battleground for the Christian faith.

Now there are the Neo-Orthodox Christians who they accept naturalism and they doubt the facticity of the bible. Therefore they view the resurrection as spiritual only, but if it is only a helpful myth – as a neo-orthodox theologian wrote in ***Resurrection: A Symbol of Hope*** – Then Paul’s critique applies as well as the common sense reaction of one critic - ***“How can a non-event (a resurrection which did not occur) be regarded as a symbol of hope or indeed of anything else? If something has happened we try and see what it means, if it has not happened the question cannot arise.”***

But many who proclaim to be Christians still protest saying , Christ may not have literally risen but he was a great teacher none-the-less:

**“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” – C.S. Lewis**

Well Brothers and Sisters, Paul doesn't want you to labor under all of these Neo-Orthodox delusions, Christ was not a poached egg. He IS RISEN

***20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

and the consequence of that is this -

Firstfruits was the first sheaf from the harvest brought to the temple the day after the Sabbath following the Passover. They were were a celebration and a guarantee from the Lord of the full harvest to come. Christ's resurrection promises the ultimate home-gathering of all God's people.