

“Christians: Pitied or Empowered?”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Theme: All truth stands or falls with the resurrection.

Introduction: There is one doctrine of the Christian Faith that raises the ire and ridicule of those outside our faith. It is what converts our souls, imparts life, empowers righteousness, and instills our hope. It causes Christianity to be distinct from the thousands of religions of the world. It enables our Faith to be with someone and not merely in a creed. It generates objections by those who are not alive through Christ ... and that is the doctrine of the resurrection. Yet, with the resurrection – everything rises or falls. If Christ is alive, the rest of the Scriptures are credible, powerful, and life-giving. If Christ is dead, then it is all a sham. None of us would know the power to overcome sin and death, and we would be dead in our transgressions and sins – facing God’s wrath. We would be like any other religion that relies on either the intimidations of the sword, the insistence of our rule, or the persuasiveness of our prophets. Instead, we are the beneficiaries of the grace of a Master who lived among us and conquered death by rising from the dead! He is alive and therefore we have life, He is risen and therefore we have power over sin, He is ascended to prepare a place for us so that we might one day join Him in triumph over the grave. **All truth stands or falls with the resurrection.**

Read the text: In our text today, we see several truths:

- I. **The Deceit of Denying the Resurrection**
- II. **The Disaster of Denying the Resurrection**
- III. **The Delusion of Denying the Resurrection**

I. THE DECEIT OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION – *15:12*

A. **The Dynamic of the Gospel**

1. As the previous section demonstrates, the core truth that energizes the Gospel message is that Jesus Christ conquered death by rising from the dead.
2. This truth was the central focus of the early church preaching:
 - a) *Acts 2:22-24* – the resurrection is crucial to Christ’s accomplishment.
 - b) *Acts 2:31-32* – the resurrection is vital to Christ’s glorification.

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- c) **Acts 4:1-2** – the resurrection was the element that disturbed the religious establishment.
- d) **Acts 17:32** – the resurrection was the point causing “sneering” by the lost.
- 3. Now Paul begins a defense of the doctrine by those who would call it into question by restating it: **“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead ...”**
- 4. **“raised”** [ἀνάστασις] means “to be caused to awaken” and “to be caused to return to life.”
- 5. The construction of this conditional clause assumes that what he is saying is true – it is preached that Christ **“has been raised from the dead.”**
- 6. They have already granted that Christ has risen from the dead – indicating that resurrection is possible; therefore, if they claim that a general resurrection of believers is not possible, then they are demeaning the Gospel itself.
- 7. This statement emphasizes the resurrection's present reality —“He lives in the present as the risen Savior!”

B. The Disdain for the Resurrection

- 1. Despite the reality of Christ’s resurrection, some rejected it: **“How do some among you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?”**
- 2. **“resurrection”** [ἀνάστασις] here literally means “to cause to stand up” – referencing the hope of living again *bodily*.
- 3. Once again, Corinth provides us with a group within the church that had strayed far from orthodoxy and had allowed their pagan heritage to shape their Christianity.
- 4. These errant believers were most likely dualists, believing that all that was spiritual was intrinsically good, while everything physical was inherently evil.
- 5. “To anyone holding that view, the idea of a resurrected body was repugnant. For them, the very reason for going to an

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afterlife was to escape all things physical.”¹

6. Some current fallacies exist concerning the issue of the resurrection:
 - a) **Seventh-Day Adventism** – teaches “**soul sleep**,” in which the body dies and disintegrates while the soul or spirit rests in that decaying body.
 - b) **Materialism** – teaches utter extinction and total annihilationism.
 - c) **Eastern Mysticism** – teaches reincarnation, wherein the soul or spirit is continually recycled from one form to another.
 - d) **New Age Philosophy** – teaches an absorption, in which the spirit returns to its source and is absorbed back into the ultimate divine mind or being (the “Force” of Star Wars).

II. THE DISASTER OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION – **15:13-19**

A. The Defeat of Christ – v. 13

1. However, denying the biblical teaching concerning the resurrection has disastrous eternal effects.
2. The first effect is that **“if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.”**
3. If the dead cannot rise, Christ is still dead and did not rise.
4. This would mean that Christ did not truly conquer death and is not alive to make intercession for us.
5. The dualist would say that Christ was not really a man, just appeared as a man, and did not die, just appeared to have died, and did not rise again, just appeared to have risen since nothing physical can be sacred or holy.
6. However, in essence, if Jesus were not human, He could not have served as our substitute and perpetrated a complex hoax that resulted in our still being enslaved to sin.

¹ MacArthur, p. 408.

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7. We do have the word of Christ on this matter – cp. *Revelation 1:17-18*.

B. The Deficiency of the Gospel – v. 14a

1. The next disastrous impact if the Lord did not rise is that *“if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain.”*
2. *“vain”* [κενός] – is a different word than in v. 2 – this term means that it is empty or devoid of any value, without purpose or result.
3. Since Paul was devoted to preaching the Gospel, he is stating here that the Gospel message itself is worthless or vain if Jesus did not literally rise from the dead – cp. *1 Corinthians 15:3-4*
4. If Jesus Christ did not conquer death and sin, thereby providing a means by which men could likewise have victory over the same, there is no good news to proclaim.

C. The Destitution of Faith – v. 14b

1. He continues and states: *“... your faith also is vain.”*
2. A dead Savior cannot give life, and therefore, if we have placed our faith in a dead savior, our faith is useless – cp. *Psalms 73:13; Isaiah 49:4*.

D. The Deceit by the Apostles – v. 15

1. Further, *“we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”*
2. The apostles' testimony is not accidental; they couldn't have made a mistake about this issue—if it is not true, they are clearly liars.
3. If they lied about the resurrection, how can they be then trusted with any of the truth they purportedly provided in Scripture?
4. Thus, without the reality of the resurrection, the morality and doctrines of the Apostles have no credence or loftiness

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whatsoever – IT ALL STANDS OR FALLS TOGETHER!

E. The Decadence of the Saints – vv. 16-17

1. Paul repeats what he's stated: ***"If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless."***
2. ***"worthless"*** [ματαιία] is the term for "idle, empty, fruitless, powerless, of no use."
3. Then he concludes with the following statement: If your faith is worthless, ***"you are still in your sins!"***
4. Thus, the saint is no better off spiritually than the sinner, and there is no expectation that we should be any more victorious over the flesh than the ungodly.
5. Yet Jesus did raise – cp. ***Acts 5:30-31.***

F. The Damnation of the Dead – v. 18

1. If the saint is no better off than the sinner, ***"Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."***
2. All believers of all ages would have believed for nothing, lived for nothing, and died for nothing.
3. All the heroes of the faith, martyrs, and fathers are right now suffering the consequences of their sin – damnation or, at best, complete annihilation.

G. The Defrauding of the Faithful – v. 19

1. The final disastrous impact of no resurrection is that ***"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."***
2. ***"pitied"*** [ἐλεεινότεροι] – refers to being deserving of sympathy for one's pathetic condition; miserable.
3. That is, we are living under such a strong delusion that someone dead could grant us peace, power, and purity.
4. If so, we pray to the ceiling, sing into the air, and hope in a lie.

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5. All these things result in a vast number of people being defrauded and hopes and desires are raised that will never be fulfilled.
6. What a true statement: we are ***“to be pitied!”***

III. THE DELUSION OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION – 15:20

A. The Dependability of the Resurrection

1. ***“But now ...”*** – is not a temporal reference but a logical one and returns to considering reality instead of the disastrous fallacies.
2. ***“Christ has been raised from the dead”*** – a statement providing assurance to all believers and countering the fallacies of a resurrection-less faith.
3. The issue of the resurrection is established as a reality – having been proven through eyewitness accounts, failure to produce the body, as well as the willingness of thousands of Christians to die – all of which would hardly seem possible if it were not true.

B. The Destiny Provided by the Resurrection

1. ***“... the first fruits of those who are asleep”*** – a statement that provides a vision for what exists for the future of each believer.
2. This is the introduction to an entirely new discussion concerning the theological implications of the resurrection.
3. Certainly, it reveals to the believer the reality of what awaits us—that we will follow in the footsteps of the One who blazed the trail into glory—cp. ***Colossians 1:18***.