

Sober Up!

(1 Corinthians 15:29-34)

Introduction

➤ There is something different about Christians. As we have seen, in our study of “1 Corinthians”, Christians have a different perspective (on life and death, and eternal life and death), different priorities, different affections, different convictions, different allegiances, and a different eternal destination than that of the non-Christian. Such differences should be readily evident in the Christian’s life.

✓ Illust: A man is being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the legal thing, and stopped at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The tailgating woman slammed on her breaks and honked her horn, yelling in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. To her surprise, he took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opens the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects. He said, “I’m very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, screaming profanities, and making profane gestures at the guy ahead of you. And then I noticed on your car the ‘Choose Life’ license plate holder, the ‘Follow Me to Sunday School’ bumper sticker, and the chrome plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed the car had been stolen.”

➤ Belief determines behavior. Though not perfect, all true Christians desire to live lives that are faithful to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their convictions govern and guide their attitudes and actions (otherwise they are not true convictions). For true Christians live under the influence of the indwelling and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. They are reborn in the Spirit and by the Spirit (Jn.3:3).

2 Cor 5:17 ~ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Ezek 36:26-27 ~ “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

Rom 6:4 ~ “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

1 John 2:6 ~ “whoever says he abides in [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

➤ Throughout our study of 1 Corinthians fifteen, we have unmistakably seen that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential part of the believer’s salvific transformation.

As always, it is important to understand the context of the passage we are studying. The fifteenth chapter of “1 Corinthians” represents the most extensive teaching on the resurrection in all of Scripture – essentially the entire chapter is dedicated to it. Specifically, the apostle Paul was addressing an issue that had risen in the church as to whether or not those (Christians) who died would experience the resurrection. Apparently, some were believing and/or teaching that they would not.

1 Cor 15:12 ~ “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Paul resoundingly argued that since Christ is risen from the dead, those who died in Christ will also rise from the dead. Which means if the dead in Christ will not rise, then Christ has not been raised from the dead. And if Christ has not been raised from the dead, Christianity is a farse and Christians are fools.

1 Cor 15:13-19 ~ “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

➤ Thankfully, “*Christ has been raised from the dead*” (vs.20; see vs.3-4). Consequently, those who are in Christ – both those who die before, and those who remain alive at, the second coming of the Lord – will be raised to eternal life. In 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, Paul continues to argue on behalf of these truths.

1 Cor 15:29-34 ~ “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?³⁰ Why are we in danger every hour?³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’³³ Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’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.”

➤ To help us understand and navigate these verses, I have identified four words that serve as markers throughout this passage of Scripture.

1. QUESTIONS (vs.29-32a)

➤ Paul asked a series of rhetorical questions – all meant to further prove, as he has been proving, that Christ’s resurrection is essential to the Gospel to one’s salvation.

- ♦ “*Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?*” (vs.29a)
- ♦ “*If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?*” (vs.29b)
- ♦ “*Why are we in danger every hour?*” (vs.30)
- ♦ “*What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?*” (vs.32a)

➤ These four questions can be divided into two main topics: 1) Baptizing for the dead, 2) Suffering persecution for Christ (as a Christian).

Baptizing for the dead? (vs.29)

➤ This is, without question, one of the most difficult verses to interpret in all of Scripture. “*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?*” (vs.29). There is no mention of “*being baptized on behalf of the dead*” anywhere else in all of Scripture (or even in other ancient writings). While many explanations (interpretations) have been offered throughout the centuries – some have suggested there are at least forty different views – all of them are speculative and should not be held dogmatically.

What we know, for sure, is what this does not (cannot) mean: Paul was not endorsing or commanding the practice of a vicarious baptism for the dead. Such a teaching, as is found in the Mormon church, is completely unbiblical and heretical. To teach a baptism for salvation of those who have died would starkly contradiction all of Paul’s teaching that a person needs to have a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Rom 3:28 ~ “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Eph 2:8-9 ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

1 John 5:11-12 ~ “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

John 3:16-18 ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

John 14:6 ~ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

- Paul’s overall point here must not be lost. The main point of this passage is not “baptizing for the dead” but “the resurrection of the dead” – *“If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?”* (vs.29). He is simply using this practice as (further) evidence for the fact that since Christ is risen from the dead, those who died/die in Christ will also rise from the dead (see 1Cor.15:23, 51-52; 1Thess.4:16).

Suffering persecution? (vs.30-32a)

- Another practical proof of the resurrection is the hardships and dangers the apostles faced for the sake of Christ, and the Gospel of Christ. *“Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³²What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?”* (vs.30-32a). The apostles, and others serving with them, were quite literally risking their lives for the sake of the Gospel – preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This suffering is quite unlike the suffering that we, as 21st century Americans, experience. To be sure, many Christians in the world today are suffering severe persecution for their faith in Christ. This has always been true (Acts 14:22; 2Tim.3:12; 1Pet.4:12), and will likely be true for us as well someday. It is important for us to understand exactly Paul was referring to when he wrote about the sufferings he (and others) endured as a Christian.

Paul

As persecutor:

Acts 8:3 ~ “But Saul was ravaging [*lumainomai*; sadistic cruelty, defiling, destroying] the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

Acts 9:1-2 ~ “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” [note: Damascus is about 150 miles north of Jerusalem]

Acts 22:4-5 ~ [To the angry mob in Jerusalem]: “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.”

Acts 22:18-21 ~ [To the angry mob in Jerusalem]: “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰And when the blood

of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.”

Acts 26:9-11 ~ [To King Herod Agrippa II (great-grandson of Herod the Great)]: “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Gal 1:13 ~ “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.” (see Gal.1:23)

As persecuted:

Acts 20:22-24 ~ “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

Acts 24:14-21 ~ [To king Felix]: “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ²¹other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

2 Cor 11:24-29 ~ “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

Peter and John

Acts 4:1-3 ~ “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”

Acts 12:1-5 ~ “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ²He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”

The apostles

Acts 5:27-42 ~ “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’ ²⁹But Peter and

the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ... ⁴⁰and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”

1 Cor 4:11-13 ~ “To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹²and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.”

2 Cor 6:4-5 ~ “... as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger”

Old Testament saints

➤ This kind of Christian persecution was normative for New Testament Christians in the first century – and for many centuries after, and still today in many places in the world. But this has almost always been the norm for God’s people, even the Old Testament saints:

Heb 11:35-38 ~ “... Some were tortured [*tympanizō*; “tympani” to be stretched out like a drum and beaten, sometimes to death], refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated [*kakoucheō*; to suffer evil, to be tormented] – ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”

✓ **Illust:** “The followers of Jesus Christ have always faced the world’s hostility. From the inception of the church, the apostles and those closely associated with them endured intense persecution. They were ridiculed, scorned, denounced, hunted, arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Many even paid the ultimate price, giving their lives as martyrs for the sake of their Savior. A brief survey of ancient Christian tradition reveals that Peter, Andrew, and James the son of Alphaeus were all crucified; Bartholomew was whipped to death and then crucified; James the son of Zebedee was beheaded, as was Paul; Thomas was stabbed with spears; Mark was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria; and James the half-brother of Jesus was stoned by order of the Sanhedrin. Philip was also stoned to death. Others, including Matthew, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus, Timothy, and Stephen, were also killed for their unwavering commitment to the Lord” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament*

Commentary: John; 16:1-11).

➤ To suffer opposition and persecution for a dead Savior (who cannot save) – to be “*in danger every hour*” (vs.30), to “*die every day!*” (vs.31; hyperbole, risking his life every day), to fight “*with beasts at Ephesus*” (vs.32; lit. or fig.) – is utter foolishness.

1 Cor 15:19 ~ “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Luke 9:23 ~ “And [Jesus] said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

2. ASSERTION (vs.32b)

➤ Quoting from the prophet Isaiah (22:13; cf. Is.56:12; Lk.12:19), Paul gave the summary assertion: “... *If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’*” (vs.32b). Paul is not necessarily advising drunkenness or gluttony (although, if there is no resurrection a hopeless, hedonistic, and/or narcissistic life is reasonable), but rather stating that without the resurrection everyone might as well enjoy the pleasures of this world as much as possible.

✓ Illust: “The Greek historian Herodotus tells of an interesting custom of the Egyptians. ‘In social meetings among the rich, when the banquet was ended, a servant would often carry around among the guests a coffin, in which was a wooden image of a corpse carved and painted to resemble a dead person as nearly as possible. The servant would show it to each of the guests and would say, ‘Gaze here and drink and be merry, for when you die such you shall be’” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*; 15:30-32).

➤ Without the resurrection of Christ (and consequently no resurrection for those who belong to Christ), this earthly life is a good as it will ever be. It is no wonder why so many unbelievers are consumed by addiction, drunkenness, and depression. For a life without Christ is a hopeless self-indulgent life. Even Christian values and virtues are ultimately meaningless apart from the resurrection.

However, since Christ is risen from the dead (and since those who belong to Christ will be raised to eternal life), the Christian can live a life of insatiable joy and meaningful service.

3. ADMONITION (vs.33)

➤ Paul then gave this sobering admonition: “*Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’*” (vs.33). He warned against being led astray (“*deceived*”; *planaō*, to be misled, to cause to wander) by false teaching or bad theology.

Ps 1:1 ~ “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers”

Prov 4:14-16 ~ “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. ¹⁶For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.”

Prov 13:20 ~ “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

Eph 5:11 ~ “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

➤ When choosing our friendships, or those to whom we wish to evangelize, we must consider the issue of influence – we must sincerely ask ourselves, “Who is influencing who?” Is the relationship drawing you closer to Christ (godliness) or drawing you away from Christ? We all must discern whether or not we are strong (or mature) enough in our Christian walk to have a specific friendship, or to be in certain situation or relationship. This includes those who may profess to be a Christian (but are not faithfully living for Christ) – for some professing Christians can be a worse influence on those who profess to be a non-Christian.

Matt 10:16 ~ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise [*phronimos*] as serpents and innocent [*akeraios*] as doves”

➤ This point is clear in the language that Paul used: “*Bad* [*kakos*; or corrupt/ “evil” (KJV)] *company* [*homilia*; or “communications” (KJV)] *ruins* [*phtheirō*; or morally deprave, “corrupt” (KJV)] *good* [*chrēstos*; useful or benign] *morals* [*ēthos*; “ethics”]” (vs.33).

4. EXHORTATIONS (vs.34)

- Christians are to be *in* the world but not *of* the world: 1) Christians are not to be isolated from the world – we are called to evangelize the world (Matt.28:19-20), to be salt and light (Matt.5:13-16). Conversely, 2) Christians are not to be worldly – we are called to live holy lives (Rom.6:1-2), confronting and exposing evil (Eph.5:11). We are called to be like a boat in the water, without getting water in the boat.
- The Corinthian Christians were being led astray by false (pagan) doctrines, and so Paul exhorted them to “knock it off!” He did this in two ways: 1) he told them what to do, and 2) he told them what not to do.

What to do (vs.34a):

- First, Paul commanded” *“Wake up from your drunken stupor”* (vs.34a). This translates one word in the Greek (*eknēphō*) and can be translated “Sober up” (NET), “become right-minded” (HCSB), “become sober-minded” (NAS). It literally refers to the process of becoming sober after being intoxicated. Figuratively, it is used to shake-off a mental delusion or confusion.

Paul exhorted the Christians to “come back to their senses”, to start (again) thinking wisely and biblically – to think *“as is right”* (vs.34a; *dikaiōs*). That is, quit buying into the false notion that there is no resurrection; stop believing those who are peddling false doctrine, quit acting like you are biblically illiterate or like you are mentally in a drunken stupor. Sober up!

What not to do (vs.34b):

- Then, once they have sobered up, Paul exhorted these Christians: *“and do not go on sinning”* (vs.34). Clearly this was not a personal conviction, or an “agree to disagree” kind of issue. To reject the doctrine of the resurrection is to sinfully reject the clear teaching of the Word of God. The resurrection of the dead, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is an essential Christian doctrine.

This, of course, is not merely limited to the sin of rejecting or distorting Christian doctrine. The sins of the Corinthians were many – immorality, divisiveness, selfishness, false worship (just to name a few). Again, “belief determines behavior.” Their failure to live right was due to the fact that they were not thinking right.

John 5:14 ~ “Afterward Jesus found him [the paralytic Jesus healed] in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’” (see Jn.8:11; Lk.13:1-5; 1Cor.11:30)

- As Paul made clear, the Corinthian Christians knew better. They could not honestly claim to *“have no knowledge of God”* (vs.34). While confused or deceived, they were not ignorant. This is why Paul wrote: “You should be ashamed of yourselves! That is, *“I say this to your shame”* (vs.34; see 1Cor.6:5).

Conclusion

- May we learn from the Corinthians’ mistakes. May we not be deceived by false doctrine, or seduced by false teachers. May we not be corrupted by worldliness. May we not be intoxicated with sin. May we walk faithfully in the love and righteousness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.