

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #70

"The Significance of the Resurrection"
(Scriptures from NKJV)

I Corinthians 15:12-19:

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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 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. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

INTRODUCTION: We are now moving from the "***many infallible proofs***" given by the eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection to the significance or importance of the resurrection as it pertains to the Christian faith. We will begin with the importance of the bodily resurrection of Christ as addressed by Paul in I Corinthians 15:12-19.

A. THE BODILY RESURRECTION AS ADDRESSED BY PAUL IN I CORINTHIANS 15:12-19.

1. The problem Paul was addressing.

a. The Corinthians believed in Christ's resurrection as seen in I Corinthians 15:1-11. But some were questioning whether there was a need or a desire for them to be resurrected and have their souls put back into their bodies sometime after the death of their bodies.

b. The Corinthians were for the most part Grecian in their background. It is essential to understand the ancient Greek philosophy of dualism if we are to comprehend what Paul is dealing with. Dualism considered everything spiritual as being basically good and everything physical as being basically evil. The idea that a physical body would be resurrected was repugnant. For the Greek, the very reason for going into an afterlife was to escape all things physical. Their philosophers taught that the soul was shackled in the body, thereby the body was the prison house of the soul. The sooner the soul was set free in death, the better off the soul would be. They believed in the immortality of the soul, but strongly opposed the idea of the resurrection of the body. Since they viewed the body as being both weak and sinful, their bodies were the last things they wanted to take along into the next life. It was this kind of thinking that Paul had to deal with when he wrote this chapter.

2. Verse 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?"***

a. Paul begins by showing that to admit to the resurrection of Christ is entirely inconsistent with the denial of the bodily resurrection of the dead. The two concepts are logically impossible. The Corinthians were trying to hold on to their old pagan ideas and mix them with the newness of the gospel, and the two will not mix. Paul is showing that the objections to the bodily resurrection equally applied to the resurrection of Christ. The two resurrections, that of Christ and that of the believer stand or fall together. The objectors probably thought they could get around the problem by claiming that Christ was not really a man, or was not fully a man. Because of their dualistic view, they assumed that because Christ was divine, He could not possibly have been human, and therefore only appeared to be human. Thus He did not really die, but only appeared to die. His appearances between the crucifixion (which were but illusions) and the ascension were simply continuous manifestations that only seemed to be bodily. So when Paul would ask the question why they were denying the resurrection, they would reply, "we are not denying the resurrection, but believe it was of a spiritual nature as opposed to a physical one." They taught that they were raised from the dead when they placed their faith in Christ. For them, the resurrection had already taken place.

b. In II Timothy 2:17, 18, Paul says this was the error of Hymeneus and Philetus. In verse 18 we read, ***"who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some."*** In summary, the church members involved believed that at the time of the death of the body, the immortal soul returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7), but the body, which is mortal, descends into the grave and is annihilated.

3. Verse 13 - ***"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen."*** Paul limits the scope of the question. By the use of the term, ***"resurrection of the dead,"*** he maintains the issue involved is not the continued existence of the soul after death, but the restoration of the body to life.

4. Verse 14 - ***"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."***

a. Paul now begins to list a series of consequences of denying the bodily resurrection of Christ.

b. First Consequence: Not even Christ has been raised. This is an obvious

conclusion if there is no such thing as the resurrection of a body.

5. Verse 14b - **"our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."**

a. Second Consequence: The trustworthiness of all Christ's claims would become invalidated.

b. Christ rested all of His claims upon His resurrection. Wilbur Smith, in his book *Therefore Stand*, points out the claims which Jesus said were to be true. If He did not rise from the dead, then none of these are true and Christianity is a fraud. Smith says:

If our Lord said, frequently, with great definiteness and detail, that after He went up to Jerusalem He would be put to death, but on the third day He would rise again from the grave, and this prediction came to pass, then it has always seemed to me that everything else that our Lord ever said must also be true. If the words concerning His Resurrection were true, then when He said that His precious blood was to be shed for the remission of sins, that is true also. When He said that He came down from the Father above, that the words He spoke the Father had given Him, that He and the Father were one, that He was indeed the Son of God, He was speaking the truth. When our Lord said that whoever would believe on Him would have everlasting life, and whoever refused to believe on Him would be eternally condemned, He spoke the truth. That empty tomb, and the fact of the risen Lord, should assure us forever that when the Lord said He was going to prepare a place for us, that He would come again and receive us to Himself, and also that when the dead heard the voice of the Son of God, they would come forth from their graves, and that He will, Himself, be the Judge of all mankind, He was speaking the truth. . . . We can never accept the Resurrection of Christ, and have any doubt about the truthfulness of any utterance that ever proceeded from His lips. (Wilbur M. Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p. 419)

c. Third Consequence: Christ's claim to be the Son of God or Deity, would be untrue. In Romans 1:3, 4, Paul makes this statement, **"concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."** The word translated **"declared"** in verse 4 means "to determine, to appoint, to designate." In Luke 22:22 it is translated "determined." **"Truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined."** It is used seven times in the New Testament to describe the person and work of Christ. The Scriptures plainly teach that the crucifixion of Christ was neither an accident nor a failure, but was accomplished according to God's "predetermined plan." (Luke 22:22). Peter declared to his fellow Jews on the Day of Pentecost that Jesus was delivered up and crucified by the **"determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."** (Acts 2:23). But God's plan did not end there, for He also raised Jesus from the dead. In so doing, He "marked out" or distinguished the Deity of Jesus from

others.

d. It is on account of this fact that the Apostles were appointed to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22). Paul then states that the preaching of the gospel is vain, void, empty of all truth, reality, and power to save, and our faith is empty also, if Christ be not raised.

e. Charles Hodge then observes:

These consequences are inevitable. For, if the apostles preached a risen and living Saviour, and made his power to save depend on the fact of his resurrection, of course, their whole preaching was false and worthless, if Christ were still in the grave. The dead cannot save the living. And if the object of the Christian's faith be the Son of God as risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God in heaven they believed a falsehood if Christ be not risen. (Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, p. 320).

6. Verse 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."***

a. Fourth Consequence: The Apostles were false witnesses (liars) and guilty of deliberate falsehood.

b. Why? Because they testified that they had seen Christ after His resurrection; that they had handled Him, felt that He had flesh and bones; that they had put their hands into His wounds, and were assured that it was the Lord. If Christ be not raised from the dead, they would be pseudo-witnesses, falsely claiming to be from God and witnessing for (or about) God that He raised up Christ.

c. John MacArthur makes this powerful statement:

To deny the resurrection is to call the apostles and every other leader of the New Testament church not simply mistaken but willfully mistaken, that is, liars. There is no possibility, as many liberals claim, that such a mistake could have been innocent or naive. Those witnesses could not have been honest men who unwittingly gave bad advice. If Christ was not raised from the dead, they not only were not sent by God with a message from Him, but were liars who would have had to conspire together in order for their lies to have been so consistent and harmonized.

If the apostles, the prophets, and the New Testament writers lied about the heart of the gospel why should they be believed about anything else? Why should their moral teachings be considered inspired and lofty if they so blatantly falsified their teaching about Jesus' resurrection? All New Testament truth stands or falls together based on the resurrection. (MacArthur, *New*

Testament Commentary I Corinthians, pp. 411-412).

d. I would make the following observation. If the New Testament writers completely misrepresented what both Christ and His Apostles taught, then the entire New Testament is but a worthless document that no reasonable person could trust. The argument is -- if the dead cannot rise, then Christ did not rise because Christ had died.

7. Verse 16 - **"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen."** This verse is a repetition of verse thirteen, and serves as a connecting hinge for the section. It seems to be with the design of preparing the way for what is to come in verse seventeen. If it is impossible for the dead to rise, then Christ has not risen.

8. Verse 17 - **"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"**

a. Fifth Consequence: Our faith is fruitless and we have no atonement for our sins.

b. This is due to the fact that Christ's resurrection is necessary for our justification. Paul affirms this in Romans 4:24, 25 which reads, **"It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences (the crucifixion), and was raised because of our justification."** The resurrection of Christ provides proof that God has accepted the sacrifice of His Son, and is now able to remain just and yet justify the ungodly. If Christ be not raised from the dead, then our sin has not been removed, and we abide yet under the wrath and condemnation of God.

c. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then sin won the victory over Christ and continues to be victorious over all men in that **"the wages of sin is death."** (Romans 6:23). The purpose of trusting in Christ is for forgiveness of sin, because it is from sin that we need to be saved. If Christ was not raised, His death was in vain, and our faith in Him is also in vain, and our sins are still counted against us. Christ's resurrection brings the message of reconciliation between God and men. Christ's death on the cross has no power apart from His resurrection from the dead. This was the theme of the Apostolic preaching in the book of Acts.

9. Verse 18 - **"Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."**

a. Sixth Consequence: All of those who have died trusting in Christ are lost.

b. The expression "**fallen asleep**" is a New Testament euphemism for the word death. A euphemism is a word or expression used in the place of another word or expression thought to be too harsh or offensive. In modern English we sometimes use the expression "he passed away" rather than "he died." I have noticed how the word "graveyard" was replaced with "cemetery" which has now been replaced with "forest lawn" or "memorial garden." We try to soften the harsh meaning of death. Some take the expression "**fallen asleep**" to teach the false doctrine of "soul sleep" in which the body dies and the soul enters a state of unconsciousness awaiting the resurrection of the body. The expression "to fall asleep in Christ" means to die in faith or to die in communion with Christ for salvation. Paul says that if there is no resurrection, then those who have died while believing, have perished. According to the Scriptures, to perish is not annihilation, but eternal misery and ruin. It is the loss of holiness and happiness forever. If Christ did not rise for the justification of those who died in Him, they will have no advocate to represent them at the final judgment and will receive the same fate as those who died with their sins unforgiven. In such a case, there would be no hope beyond the grave. This would make Christianity no better than the worse form of paganism, and death would be the final victor.

10. Verse 19 - "**If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**"

a. Seventh Consequence: Christians would be the most pathetic people on earth. If a person embraces Christ only with the hope of improving this present life, he will soon become deluded. How so? John MacArthur puts it this way:

Without the resurrection, and the salvation and blessings it brings, Christianity would be pointless and pitiable. Without the resurrection we would have no Savior, no forgiveness, no gospel, no meaningful faith, no life, and no hope of any of those things.

To have hoped in Christ in this life only would be to teach, preach, suffer sacrifice, and work entirely for nothing. If Christ is still dead, then He not only cannot help us in regard to the life to come, but He cannot help us now. If He cannot grant us eternal life, He cannot improve our earthly life. If He is not alive, where would be our source of peace, joy, or satisfaction now. The Christian life would be a mockery, a charade, a tragic joke.

A Christian has no Savior but Christ, no Redeemer but Christ, no Lord but Christ. Therefore if Christ was not raised, He is not alive, and our Christian life is lifeless. We would have nothing to justify our faith, our Bible study, our preaching or witnessing, our service for Him or our worship of Him, and nothing to justify our hope either for this life or the next. We would deserve nothing but the compassion reserved for fools. (*Ibid.*, pp. 413, 414).

b. Charles Hodge adds further:

This passage does not teach that Christians are in this life more miserable than other men. This is contrary to experience. Christians are unspeakably happier than other men. All that Paul means to say is, that if you take Christ from Christians, you take their all. He is the source not only of their future, but of their present happiness. Without him they are yet in their sins, under the curse of the law, unreconciled to God, having no hope, and without God in the world; and yet subject to all the peculiar trials incident to a Christian profession, which in the apostolic age often included the loss of all things. (Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, p. 323).

c. As I am speaking today, the date is October 4, 2015. Fifty-two years ago, I entered the calling to the Gospel ministry. After fifty-two years, in three months I plan to retire from my duties as a pastor. I will continue on in other areas of the ministry as long as my health allows. It has been a great joy to have served the Lord in the role of a teaching shepherd. It is the highest honor which God bestows upon a person. But it has its heartaches and hardships which require one to bear as a good soldier of Christ. It is a spiritual warfare which inflicts many wounds that I will take to my grave. If Christ be not raised from the dead, I will be shown to have been nothing less than a pitiable or miserable fool -- all of this life spent for nothing. Paul is driving the logical nail into the coffin of the error of the Corinthians.

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

a. ***"But now."*** The first two words in the text are important. ***"But"*** is a transitional word connecting a contrasting expression of thought. All of the gloomy consequences presented in the preceding verses follow from the assumption that Christ did not arise from the dead. But the fact is that He is now risen, and the preceding consequences no longer have any bearing on the subject. All of Christ's claims are valid. His claim to be God is true, the Apostles are honest and true witnesses, our preaching is not in vain, our faith is not in vain, the dead in Christ have not perished, and we are not to be pitied for our faith.

b. Paul now breaks forth in song and praise, and unconditionally asserts the resurrection of Christ.

c. Christ is said to be the ***"first-fruits."*** This requires us to understand the meaning of the term ***"first-fruits."*** This takes us back to Leviticus 23:10-11, ***"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give***

to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it." A sheaf is a bundle of stalks of wheat, rye, oats, or barley. Before the Israelites harvested their crops they were to bring a thank-offering to the Lord. The sheaf was the first fruits of the coming harvest. The full harvest could not be made until the first-fruits were offered. This is the point that Paul is making. Christ's own resurrection was the first-fruits of the resurrection harvest of the rest of the believing dead. In His death and resurrection, Christ made an offering of Himself to the Father on the believers' behalf.

The significance of the first fruits, however, was not only that they preceded the harvest, but they were a first installment of the harvest of the rest of the crop to follow. In other words, Christ's resurrection could not have been in isolation from ours. His resurrection requires our resurrection because His resurrection was the first part of the larger resurrection of God's redeemed people. Christ's elect are those whose souls have been redeemed by Christ's particular redemption. They are His purchased possession. Christ has not only risen, but He has risen in a representative character. His resurrection is the pledge of the resurrection of His people.

The resurrection of His people from the dead is yet a future event. In Romans 8:22-25 it reveals that our present bodies have not yet been redeemed, but the certainty of the event abides and gives us a hope in the afterlife of having a glorified body like that of our Lord. ***"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."*** In Philippians 3:20-21, we are told that the believer eagerly waits for this change to occur. ***"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*** Thus, the Christian's hope of the afterlife rests upon the resurrection of Christ, and becoming like Him. This hope was first instilled within us when we professed faith in Christ at the point of our conversion.

d. In Romans 10:9, 10, Paul explains that a belief in Christ's Lordship and His resurrection as essential elements which must exist as the object of one's confession of faith. ***"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your***

heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. There resides in many evangelical circles much confusion as to what one must do to be saved. An inquirer may be told to go to the altar at the close of a sermon, pray a prescribed prayer, invite Jesus into his heart, be baptized, and the list goes on and on. The problem is that in many cases the inquirer is never confronted with the fact that he must acknowledge Jesus as his sovereign Lord and believe that God has raised Him from the dead. This is what constitutes a confession of faith. Why do so many people who are told to do the things I previously mentioned soon fall away and revert back to their previous way of life? It is because they were never truly converted to the Lordship of Christ and His resurrection from the dead! Being saved does not require going through some type of an emotional experience, but it consists of a simple, but sincere, believing in Christ and His way of becoming righteous in God's sight. ***"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."*** (Romans 10:17). Trust in the gospel today if you have never done so. In so doing, you will be saved and receive eternal life with Christ in the hereafter.