

Week 2: 1 Corinthians 15:12–34 – The Hope of Our Resurrection

Hook



Main Point: The Resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection.

Q: If you could go back in time in each of the following decades and invest, which companies would you choose?

- 1980s
- 1990s
- 2000s
- 2010s

The following are the top performing stocks over the past 30 years, citing their 30-year total return (or since Initial Public Offering):

- Monster Beverage Corporation: 444,868%
- Nvidia Corporation (a technology company): 373,227%
- Amazon.com Incorporated: 273,347%¹

Q: What investments have you made that you knew were “sure things” and turned out to be successful?

Q: What investments have you made that you knew were “sure things” and turned out to be less than successful?

Transition: In today’s section of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argues that you can be completely confident in the coming Resurrection of believers. It’s a guarantee, not a gamble. And in today’s passage, Paul explains the reasoning.

RECAP: In this year’s Easter series, instead of studying the Easter account of the Resurrection in the Gospels, we are doing a deep dive into 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s most comprehensive theological statement about the Resurrection and what it means for believers. In lesson 1, we learned that the Resurrection is not a theological side issue; it

is central to the Gospel. We learned that the Resurrection is a verifiable fact supported by many eyewitnesses. We also learned that the transformation the Spirit makes in our lives when we accept Christ is like a resurrection itself; our old self dies and we are risen to a new life in Christ.

In this lesson, we will see Paul explain that, because Jesus was resurrected bodily, we can be sure of our own bodily resurrection.

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Book

Main Point: The Resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:12–19 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Without the Resurrection, our whole belief system is false, futile and tragic.

Q: Why does our faith not make any sense without the Resurrection?

Q: In what scenario are Christians to be “*most pitied*”?

Some people in the Corinthian church were saying there is no Resurrection of the dead. This is a theological issue about which different sects of Judaism disagreed. The ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, was comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees, who deeply disagreed about the concept of the Resurrection from the dead:

- *The Pharisees* were experts in the Law who emphasized careful obedience to the law; their influence shaped rabbinic Judaism. They believed in a future bodily resurrection of the righteous at the end of the age (at the final judgment, the Day of the Lord), when the wicked would be punished and the righteous would be vindicated.
- *The Zealots* were a revolutionary group who believed that Israel’s faithfulness required violent resistance to Roman rule. They also believed in a future bodily resurrection at the end of the age. The hope of the Resurrection fueled their willingness to die for the kingdom of God.
- *The Essenes* were a separatist community who withdrew from mainstream society to live in communes in the wilderness to pursue purity and righteousness. They believed in an afterlife but not a bodily resurrection, just an immortality of the soul.
- *Hellenistic Jews* were Jews who had integrated into Greek society while maintaining faithfulness to Judaism. They also emphasized an immortality of the soul instead of a bodily resurrection because they were heavily influenced by Greek dualistic philosophy.
- *The Sadducees* were a priestly aristocratic group centered on the Jerusalem temple who only held the Torah as sacred and rejected any beliefs not explicitly found in the Torah. They did not believe in the Resurrection or even spirits or angels.²

Most average Jews were not explicitly in any sect but were influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and believed in a future resurrection of the dead at the end of the age, as Martha described to Jesus when Lazarus died (John 11:24). Most of the Corinthian church were Gentiles, so their skepticism about resurrection came from Greek

philosophy, which taught gnostic dualism. Their view was humanity was body and soul, the soul was eternal and divine and the body was material and mortal. Paul wants to show them that God values the physical world and He will ultimately show this in the Resurrection.

Paul explained to the Corinthians that you can't believe in the Gospel of Jesus and not believe in a future bodily resurrection of the dead. It simply doesn't make sense. Christ was raised in body, not just in soul.

Paul reminded them that the Gospel they had received proclaimed that Christ was raised from the dead. He then used the rhetoric technique developed by ancient Greek philosophy, *reductio ad absurdum* (Latin: "reduction to absurdity"), which attempts to debunk a claim by showing that following the logic of the claim would lead to absurdity or contradiction. He took the claim "there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12) and followed it to its logical conclusion, which has absurd, unacceptable results. Paul built a tight causal chain of conditional clauses (if/then) to show that denying the Resurrection collapses the entire Christian faith:

If there is no resurrection of the dead
then Christ has not been raised
then our preaching and your faith is in vain
then we are misrepresenting God
then we are still in our sins
then the dead in Christ have perished
then our hope in Christ is only for this life
then we are of all people the most to be pitied

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then the rest of the world should feel sorry for Christians because that means we are putting our faith in something that has no eternal hope. Without the Resurrection, our faith is meaningless and hopeless, and we are still in bondage to sin. The Resurrection of Christ is directly related to the work He accomplished on the Cross. Denying the Resurrection is to deny the efficacy of the Cross. It means all our preaching of the Gospel is pointless. If you believe this, your faith is false, futile and tragic. You cannot believe in Jesus and not believe in a bodily resurrection.

Q: Why is the resurrection of dead so important?

Q: Why are Christians without hope if Christ did not rise from the dead?

1 Corinthians 15:20–28 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Christ's Resurrection guarantees our future resurrection.

Q: What does it mean that Christ is the “firstfruits” of the Resurrection?

Here Paul flipped the script and followed the logical conclusion of the claim that Christ has been raised from the dead, which is what the Gospel teaches and what the Corinthians had already accepted as true. This was a decisive reversal, not a continuation of the “if/then” hypothetical argument. He moved from conditional clauses (if/then) to truths, and everything negated in verses 12–19 is restored and redefined.

Paul described our salvation and the coming of the kingdom of God as a multi-step process, a theology called “inaugurated eschatology.” *Eschatology* is the study of the end times, and *inaugurated* means it has already started but is not yet complete. This is how Christ could say “the kingdom is here” when He came the first time, even though the future, final kingdom where there is no more sin, mourning, death or pain had not yet come.

Paul described Christ's Resurrection as the “firstfruits.” In Old Testament law, the firstfruits were the first part of the harvest that were offered to God, symbolizing the dedication of the entire harvest to God (Leviticus 23:9–14). The offering demonstrated their trust in God's continued provision because they gave the first of their harvest before reaping the rest. Jesus was the “firstfruits” of the “harvest” of humanity. He was resurrected first, guaranteeing the future resurrection of all those who trust in Him. Jesus' Resurrection was the beginning of the resurrection of all humanity who trust in Him.

Paul explained that just as death came through one man (Adam), so life comes through one man (Jesus) (vv. 21–22). He explained the two-step process of the Resurrection. Christ was raised first, then “at His coming,” those who belong to Him will be raised, the full harvest. This is the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age taught by the Pharisees, but Paul explained that it is accomplished through Christ. Christ will return for His Church, and the dead in Christ will be resurrected. Then comes “the end”; He will destroy every power, put all enemies under His feet, and deliver the kingdom of God to His Father (vv. 23–28).

The kingdom of God is already here. Christ is reigning now in the hearts of His people and in their communities, the Church. But it is not yet here in all its fullness, when all evil will be destroyed. Christ *conquered* sin and death in His Resurrection, but He has not yet *destroyed* death (v. 26). That will happen at His Second Coming. Death is defeated but not gone. Its power is broken, but its presence remains. People still die the first

death, but because of Christ, those who believe in Him will be raised to eternal life with Him. One day, all things will be made new, and there will be no more evil, mourning or pain (Revelation 21:4). In that final consummation, all things will be subjected to Him, and God will be all in all (v. 28). Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10).

Q: In verses 21 – 22, how does Paul compare Adam and Christ? What is the result of each?

Q: How does the truth of Christ's resurrection give you hope in the face of death or loss?

1 Corinthians 15:29–34 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Not believing in the Resurrection means you don't really know God.

Q: How would not believing in the Resurrection influence the way we live now?

Q: What does the apostles risking their lives for the Gospel tell us about it?

This section is another *reductio ad absurdum* but with an important difference. This time, Paul expanded the argument and transitioned from negative refutation to positive instruction, from *reductio ad absurdum* to rebuttal to explanation. He started with if/then:

If the dead are not raised, then ...

Why baptize for the dead?

Why do we risk danger?

Why not just live for temporal pleasures (eat and drink)?

Paul's phrase "baptize on behalf of the dead" (v. 29) has been much debated among scholars and theologians. Comparing it to Paul's other writings, we can be confident he would not have supported a practice of "vicarious baptism" or "proxy baptism," i.e., people being baptized on behalf of others who have died. This phrase reflects Corinthian behavior, not apostolic instruction. It's *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. Paul did not support this practice, but he used it in his rhetorical argument to show their inconsistency between belief and practice by denying the Resurrection. If there were no Resurrection, then their unorthodox practice of baptizing for the dead was meaningless. This is part of his *reductio ad absurdum* argument. He didn't support the practice, yet he used it to show how absurd their practice was if they didn't believe in a future bodily Resurrection.

In Romans, Paul used the imagery of baptism to say that if we die with Christ, we will also live with Him (Romans 6:1–14). If we aren't going to rise from the dead as Christ did, why do we practice baptism? What does it mean? Then it would only be like the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance. But Acts is very clear that there is a major difference between the baptism into Christ and the baptism of John (Acts 18:25). A baptism that only leads to repentance, turning back to God in this life, is an incomplete Gospel. The baptism of Christ points us to a bodily Resurrection from the dead like His.

Paul also rightly explained that the apostles wouldn't risk losing their lives if there were no hope of the Resurrection. If this life were all there was, they would try to live as long as possible. Finally, he arrived at the "absurd" conclusion – if there is no Resurrection, no afterlife, we might as well just "eat and drink" and get as much pleasure as possible while we can – hedonism. There were similar hedonistic sayings in Greek philosophy, but this is a quote from Isaiah, when God called His people to repentance, but they responded with this phrase, so God said their sin would not be atoned (Isaiah 22:12–14). Hedonism wasn't just an issue among the Gentiles; it was also a temptation for God's people. So, Paul moved past the absurd statement to sharp rebuttal and exhortation to "wake up" and stop sinning.

It may sound drastic to say not believing in the Resurrection is a sin. It isn't an immoral action; it's a theological mistake, right? But for Paul it was deeper; it was an issue of "knowledge of God," which isn't just intellectual knowledge, but relational knowing (v. 34). To deny the Resurrection meant they didn't understand why Jesus came, His kingdom, or the Gospel. Which meant they didn't really know God, no matter what they said. Their faith was just a set of rules to live by, not a relationship with the living God through Christ. It was behavior modification, not real transformation. Which meant their lives weren't any different from the hedonists who live for only temporal pleasures. By not really knowing Jesus, they were missing out on the real joy and fulfillment that come from Him. So, they, too, were only living for temporal pleasures; they just didn't realize it.

Q: How have you seen people live with a hedonistic mindset? How have you seen some Christians live that way too, even though they confess to know Jesus?

Q: In what ways have you found a deeper kind of true joy, fulfillment and pleasure from your relationship with Christ? Give specific examples.

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Took

Main Point: The Resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection.

There is no question or wavering – because of the Resurrection of Jesus, believers are guaranteed resurrection. To Paul, that fact demands a response, namely a present obedience and eternal perspective. In light of the resurrection, we must:

- **Live with eternal confidence, not fear** (1 Corinthians 15:54–58; Hebrews 2:14–15).
- **Store up treasures in heaven, not on earth** (Matthew 6:19–21).
- **Be steadfast and immovable in faith** (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- **Abound in the work of the Lord, knowing it is not in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- **Set our mind on things above, not earthly things** (Colossians 3:1–4).
- **Pursue holiness in light of our future Resurrection** (1 Peter 1:15–16; 1 John 3:2–3).
- **Hold loosely to temporary comforts and possessions** (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).
- **Endure suffering with hope, knowing glory is coming** (Romans 8:18–25).
- **Share the Gospel urgently, because eternity is at stake** (2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the way you are living right now. Does it reflect a real hope in the Resurrection? Or are you living like the hedonist who only lives for temporal pleasures? Is your life more behavior modification, or is there true transformation by the Holy Spirit? Does your life reflect a true understanding of the Gospel of grace and a full understanding of the Gospel of the kingdom of God? How can you tell the difference between a life of someone who really knows God and someone who just believes in the tenets of Christianity?

PRAY for God to bring you closer in relational knowledge of Him. Thank Him for the hope of the future resurrection and the glorious inheritance that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven. Pray for opportunities to share the hope of the Resurrection with others in the coming days, weeks, months and years. Ask Him for the wisdom and boldness to share the hope you have in Jesus.

ACT: Share your hope. Share with someone this week why you have hope in the future resurrection of the dead and the kingdom of God. Share your reasons for believing in God's promises of an inheritance in heaven and how it impacts the way you live right now.

¹ <https://money.usnews.com/investing/articles/best-performing-stocks-past-30-years>

² "Resurrection," Jewish Encyclopedia

Jan A. Sigvartsen "Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Second Temple Period," *The Bible and Interpretation* (January 2020)

George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity: Expanded Edition*, *Harvard Theological Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).