

If Christ has not been raised  
1 Corinthians 15:12-19  
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## INTROUDUCTION

My dogs killed a chicken last week. Jerry, my brother, is raising some chickens and ducks. My dogs love the idea. Eventually, they figured out how to work the door on the fence and let a few of the chickens out, and were able to catch one before they got caught. I found out because I came home and saw a chicken tied around my dog's neck. Apparently this sort of aversion therapy can help to train a dog. It might have worked, but that the other dog later that night started a fight over that chicken and pulled it off. Then the two dogs fought each other for a long time. The dead chicken just lay in the grass. On Friday, I walked outside to see a bunch of big blue flies all over my porch. Gross! Someone had made the mistake of picking up the dead chicken and throwing it in the trash can on the porch. So, I took the chicken and disposed of it away from the house.

I tell you that story to convince you there is an extremely dead chicken decomposing on the edge of my property. Now, let's say all the greatest and smartest men of earth were gathered together and I was allowed to give them one task: bring that chicken back to life. What would they do? Would they give up right away or give it a try? Everyone knows it can't be done. When a living being dies, that's it. It cannot be brought back to life. However, we Christians believe that our faith hinges on the event known as the resurrection, when a man three days dead, dead enough to draw flies, returned to life. We believe this and the world finds us a little crazy for believing it. For it seems impossible to them. We say it is not impossible because of God. Christians hold to this teaching as the proof of our faith. At least, we are supposed to. Believe it or not, there are hundreds of seminary trained pastors, ministers, priests, and professors of the Christian faith who say that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead.

Here are two examples:

Bishop Shelby Spong

*On Easter the crucified Jesus, who was laid in the grave as a deceased man on Good Friday, was by the mighty act of God, restored to life on Easter. He had thus broken the power of death for all people. If the body of Jesus was not physically restored to life, the fundamentalists claim, then Easter is fraudulent. There can be no compromise here. Those who waver on this foundational truth of Christianity have, according to this perspective, abandoned the essential core of their faith tradition. Well, my only comment on this would be to borrow the words from an old song and say, "It ain't necessarily so!"*

Don Murray, United Church of Canada

*I don't think there is anything supernatural about Jesus' resurrection. It is not surprising that the presence of a person of his stature and quality would be felt after his death. And his appearances may have much to say about the Mystery of the beyond and how the psyche works. Our presence, I believe, stays alive in the Universe in some way. But I wouldn't be too certain about what form it takes, or whether we are personally aware of it or not.*

Wow. That's a pretty fancy way of explaining the resurrection without including a resurrection. It is akin to "he lives on in our hearts" or "he lives on in the spirit." But he will not say, "He has risen bodily." Some false teachers had likewise come into the church in Corinth and began to preach that Jesus is the way, but that He did not really rise from the dead. Let me be as clear as possible: the Bible teaches that you cannot be Christian and believe that Jesus did not rise from the dead. This error made many centuries ago is still being made today. There are people who want to change the truth of the scripture by saying, "Yes, Jesus is a good guy and we should follow Him, but let's not say He rose from the dead." Why do they do this? My guess is that they are embarrassed by holding to this teaching in a world that laughs at it. But the Bible is clear:

Romans 10:9 9. because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It is in the formula of salvation itself: belief that Jesus rose from the dead is essential. Christ died for sins, this is true. That truth must be completed, though, with the words, He rose again from the dead. This is what Christians believe. Paul spent the first part of 1 Corinthians 15 recounting how he, the apostles, and at least 500 other people had seen the resurrected Jesus. Now, in our text, he is moving from the evidence of eye-witnesses to the necessity for our faith to be real of Jesus being raised from the dead.

### **TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

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? 13. 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 this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In this text, Paul gives five benefits of Christ being raised from the dead, but he does it by saying, "What if He wasn't raised? If that is true, then what else is true?" Let's see how far we can get with these 5 benefits of the resurrection, stated in the negative.

### **IF THE RESURRECTION NEVER TOOK PLACE, THEN....**

#### ***1. Preaching is in vain.***

We don't need preachers if there is no resurrection for there is no salvation. Preaching is the method of bringing salvation to the world. There are those who devalue preaching, belittle preaching, misuse preaching, and many who just don't preach. But Paul values highly. How are we to take lost people and help them come to know Jesus? We do this by the declaration of a message. We like to say talk is cheap, and many times it is worthless. However salvation comes

to this world over and over again by the means of the lips of man. Talking, preaching, declaring is what brings salvation and builds the church. So, if we believe that Christ is not raised, then there is no need for preaching it all, because it will not result in salvation. To state this in the positive sense then: because of the resurrection, ***preaching leads to the salvation for lost individuals.***

## ***2. The gospel needs to be restated, for the Apostles' gospel is false***

*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.*

Our gospel message is weighted towards this life, and not the next. I think this is a problem we need to solve. We speak of people getting their sins forgiven, as we should, and living for Christ, as we should, and we tell them to share this message with their friends. But we rarely say, "And remember, Christ rose from the dead, and so will you."

The goal of Americans is a happy life on earth. Because of this, we can de-emphasize the resurrection because we don't relate to the hope it brings. This is why I love telling people that they are going to die. We are not very aware of it apparently. There are places in the earth, like Iraq, where people understand that death awaits us all. We have modern medicine so we don't have plagues wiping us out all the time to remind us of death. We don't live in a war torn country. All that is good, of course, but our focus might be unrealistic. But Americans don't think about death much. We should. It is a reality and the death rate is still at 100% as far as I know. The message of the apostles included a recounting of the resurrection and a focus on the glory that would be revealed when we all joined in this joyous day (from road-kill to risen for all of us!).

To put this benefit of the resurrection in positive words, we'd say, "***Because of the resurrection, the message of the Apostles is true, and not false.***"

## ***3. Faith is futile and you are in your sins***

*17. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

If Christ did not rise, then there is no forgiveness of sins for us. Even though the price was paid on the cross, apart from Him rising, no forgiveness of sins can be granted. Why not? Forgiveness of sins cannot be granted to the dead. Do you know what the meaning of baptism is? It is identifying with Jesus on the cross and coming out of the grave. It symbolizes our salvation experience. The way we are saved is by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. But we didn't die on a cross, Jesus did in our place. We didn't rise from the dead, Jesus did. But as we didn't die, but His death is counted as ours, so will His raising be counted as ours and we will be raised.

Romans 6:4-5 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. 5. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We die with Him. We will live with Him. But if He didn't rise, neither will we, and then we are still in our sins and the soul that sins must die, and judgment and punishment await us. To put this positively: **A benefit of the resurrection is that we do not remain in our sins, but have everlasting life.**

#### ***4. The dead in Christ are gone forever***

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

Not only am I going to die, but so are the people I love. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then I will never see them again. I have great concern for all my family members and friends because I want to see them after this life ends. Those friends and loved ones I know who know Jesus, I know I will see again. My message to my wife and my kids, when I die, is this: don't worry. I will see you again, and you will see me; because Jesus rose from the dead. Because of Jesus rising from the dead, we can tell one another in times of suffering, "You will be free of this one day, completely. It will get better. One day we will be discussing this in glory and there will be no more tears."

But if Christ is not raised, there is no hope. When one of us dies, that's the last we see of him. There is no need for funerals for there is no hope to offer to anyone. If there is no resurrection, we should just put our loved ones in the hole and forget about them as fast as possible, because they are gone. Human beings can hardly deal with the sadness of death as it is. How much more hopeless is it, if death ends our relationships. Put in the positive, because of the resurrection, ***those who have fallen asleep in Jesus have not perished.*** They live and you will see them again. All of us who know Jesus here today, we will be together again in the resurrection from the dead, before you know it. It will be fast, and we will rejoice in one another forever.

#### ***5. Those that live their lives for Christ are to be pitied***

Because the cost Jesus requires is high. It is not worth paying if it all ends here.

*19 If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

All who live godly in Christ will be persecuted from time to time. But I think in this verse Paul is referring not to all Christians, but to those who suffer most for the gospel, to himself and his traveling companions. Paul gave up the option of family for the sake of the gospel. Paul gave up comfort, position, power, money. And he exchanged these things for beatings, jail, shipwrecks, sickness, sleepless nights of worry, rejection, abuse, and, eventually, execution. He gave

up all his world had to offer, and received all the muck this world could dish out. And he says to the Corinthians, if Christ is not raised from the dead, then I am the most pitiful man on the earth, for I am a fool.

Philippians 3:8-11 8. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . . 10. that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11. that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

If there is no resurrection, then it is not worth it to give up anything in this world for Christ. In the positive we could say this: **Because of the resurrection, it is to our benefit to give all to Christ.**

This belief is needed by those who stand for Christ if we are to build His Church on earth, to increase its health and its size. It costs us to build the church of Jesus Christ, and the cost is high. Jesus expects us to join Him in sacrifice and suffering in order to build His church. We at Harvest are seeking to be healthy here. We are seeking to grow healthy multi-site locations. We are seeking to grow in our local outreach. We are seeking to grow in planting churches around the world. All these things cost. They cost more than what is easy or convenient to give. They cost more than an occasional drop of left-over money in the basket. They cost more than the leftover time you might have to maybe participate once in a while if you can “help a little.”

In order to build and grow God’s church on this earth, which is why you exist if you call yourself a Christian, you will have to give up all. You will have to give up your pride and your shame and deal with your sins. You will have to give up your property for the sake of the gospel. You will have to give up a mentality that says I need to be safe, I need to have a safe home, job, friends, and health insurance. To grow the Church of Christ takes giving all. And if there was no resurrection, you’d be a fool to do it. If there was no resurrection, I wouldn’t ask you do it, for then there is no salvation for you or anyone. But because there is a resurrection, I have no apology for calling you to tithe of your income and more. I make no apology of calling you to give up your vacation to go on a mission trip, or to quit your job and sell your house and move to another state or another country. Because the resurrection makes it all worth it, for you attain Christ and His resurrection.

You don’t know how easy you have it. You think you do a great thing for God if you make it to church on Sunday. We have a faith that costs almost nothing. Some here will give all. Many will not. But know this about the Kingdom of God: God does much with those who give all, and He does nothing with those who give little. His Son bled and died and rose that He might save and build His Church. He calls us to do the same, to join Him in bleeding and dying and giving of ourselves to build His Church. Our labors are not in vain.