

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 15:12-34

Topic

Paul gives a strong defense for our future resurrection from the dead, comparing the physical death of our body to being asleep

Title

"You Can Sleep When You're Dead"

Try taking "The China Challenge." The challenge is to see how long you can quit using, and refrain from purchasing, anything that says, "Made in China."

There's a book, *A Year Without Made in China*, that chronicles one family's attempt to do just that. Here are a few quotes from an interview with its author:

"Our coffeemaker broke and all ordinary drip coffeemakers are made in China. So we ended up boiling water in a pan and just pouring it over filters into our coffee mugs. Our blender also broke about mid-year, and we couldn't repair it because the replacement blade was made in China, so that sat there gathering dust."

Lamps, birthday candles, mouse traps and flip-flops. Your Apple devices... Your Samsung Galaxy... Most laptop computers... In fact, most electronics are "Made in China," or at least have components that are.

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For fun, look around your house for stuff “Made in China,” and think about life without it.

The apostle Paul issued a far more serious ‘life-without’ challenge to the believers in the church in Corinth: “What would life be like if there were no resurrection from the dead?”

His answer: “Your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins...”

No worries, however; “Christ **is** risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Let’s hear what else Paul had to say about the resurrection of Jesus, and ours. I’ll organize my comments around two questions: #1 What Would Your Life Be Like If There Were No Resurrection From The Dead?, and #2 What Should Your Life Be Like Since There Is A Resurrection From The Dead?

#1 What Would Your Life Be Like If There Were No Resurrection From The Dead? (v12-19)

The apostle Paul could hardly believe what he was hearing from the Corinthians about the resurrection of the dead:

1Co 15:12 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?

Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is the Gospel Paul preached. Some among them were teaching that Jesus was raised, *but His followers won’t be.*

1Co 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

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The Lord's resurrection and ours is a package deal. They cannot logically, or theologically, be separated. You can't have one without the other.

Can you have a groom if there is no bride? Jesus is our heavenly Groom; we are His betrothed bride. As the apostle John wrote, "We know that when he appears we will be like him..." (First John 3:2). Since He rose from the dead in a glorified body, so must we, His bride, be raised from the dead in a glorified body in order to "be like Him."

1Co 15:14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.

1Co 15:15 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.

Their claim that believers don't rise turned the Gospel into a cruel lie, and the apostles into liars. It's important we think about the consequences of the things we say about Jesus.

1Co 15:16 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

It is a necessary effect of the Gospel that believers will be resurrected just as was their Lord. You can't say that we won't, or that it doesn't matter. We will; it does.

Paul issued his challenge by asking them, in the next three verses, to consider the real-world and the after-world consequences of their position.

1Co 15:17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!

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Paul expanded on what he had just said about their “faith” being “empty.” Not only would it have no content. Faith in a dead Savior reduces Christianity to nothing more than a man-made religion, like all the others whose main figure is dead and buried.

1Co 15:18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

“Asleep” was the way Paul described believers at death. It has to do with your body - your remains or cremains. It’s like your body is asleep on earth because it is waiting to be utilized in your future resurrection. Your spirit is absent from your body and immediately, consciously present with the Lord.

If you’re wondering, “How are the dead raised?,” check out verse thirty-five. Paul answers in the verses following.

If there is no resurrection for believers, at death you “perish.” The immediate consequence for the Corinthians was that they’d never see their deceased loved ones again. That’s huge.

1Co 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

There’s something terribly wrong with “this life.” In Christ there is hope of redemption for humanity and for creation. A glorious restoration is promised. If Jesus didn’t rise, and if we don’t, all such future hope is lost, and we are to be pitied, living for a false hope.

In *Star Trek V the Final Frontier*, Mr. Spock’s brother, Sybok, wants to use a ship to reach the mythical planet Sha Ka Ree, the place where creation began. The planet lies behind a seemingly impenetrable barrier near the center of the galaxy. He thinks he has found God beyond the Great Barrier.

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“God” turns out to be a cosmic criminal who has deceived Sybok, because he needs a starship to escape. It was all a lie.

If you mess with the resurrection, the entirety of the Bible becomes a lie. It’s one of the non-negotiable truths.

The resurrection is legit. God’s not dead.

#2 What Should Your Life Be Like Since There Is A Resurrection From The Dead? (v20-34)

You might remember Charles Atlas. That wasn’t his real name; he was born Angelo Siciliano. The Italian-American bodybuilder developed an exercise program which spawned a landmark advertising campaign featuring his name and likeness. It has been described as one of the longest-lasting and most memorable ad campaigns of all time.

In the print ads, a skinny kid is at the beach with his girlfriend when a bully kicks sand on him.

He is humiliated, and his girl calls him, “Little Boy.”

But after following the Charles Atlas routine, he bulks up, finds the bully, and punches him in the face. His girlfriend exclaims, “You’re a real man after all.”

Wanna be a ‘real’ Christian? Then realize the spiritual difference made by Jesus’ resurrection, and your future resurrection.

1Co 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

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"Firstfruits" were the initial harvest. They represented and promised a greater harvest to come.

The resurrection of Jesus is like that in that He represented and promised the future, physical resurrection of "those who have fallen asleep." He died and rose, and He went to Heaven. All who die in Christ will rise and be taken to Heaven.

1Co 15:21 For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

"Adam" represented every future human being when he and Eve decided of their own free will to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. God told them the consequences would be "death," and death is what followed.

"In Adam all die" are four words that summarize the human condition:

- Why is there disease, disaster, and death? "In Adam all die."
- Why is there racism? "In Adam all die."
- Why is there violence and war? "In Adam all die."

Not fair, you say? *Wait and listen to this.* Jesus **also** represented the entire human race in His decision to obey God. When you identify with Him, you go from death to life. In Jesus all live.

The Corinthians were not thinking far back enough. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection - and ours - is part of the greater plan of God, revealed in Eden, to redeem and to restore all things.

Believers have been dying since the first century. Why are their remains and cremains still interred?

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1Co 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are Christ's* at His coming.

The word "order" is important, letting you know that the resurrection of the human race will occur in stages - **not** all at once!

Jesus was the first to be raised never to die again. For sure, He had raised others during His ministry. But they died again.

You might remember, too, that in the Gospel of Matthew, it mentions that many saints rose from the dead when Jesus did.

Albert Barnes comments, "The graves were opened at his death, by the earthquake, and the bodies came out at his resurrection... Thus establishing the truth of our Lord's resurrection in particular, and of the resurrection of the body in general, by many witnesses."

The next stage in the resurrection of the saints are "those who are Christ's at His coming." What coming? We'll see at the end of this chapter that Paul meant the coming of Jesus to rapture the church - to remove living believers off the planet prior to the Great Tribulation. In that stage of the resurrection the Lord will, "...descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (First Thessalonians 4:16-17).

When it happens, the spirits of believers who have died between the resurrection of Jesus and the rapture will be reunited with their bodies. We will see at the end of chapter fifteen that their bodies will be raised incorruptible and glorious. Living believers will be raptured - transformed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

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1Co 15:24 Then *comes* the end...

The "end" Paul was talking about leaps forward *past* the seven-year Great Tribulation and to the end of the one thousand year reign of Jesus on earth that follows the Tribulation. Every believer from every age will have been raised and be in their glorified bodies fit for eternity.

1Co 15:24 Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

1Co 15:25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

The Old Testament promised Israel the Kingdom of God on earth. Lasting for one-thousand years, we call it the Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus "must reign" over it. It is a real, earthly kingdom. It ends with one, final, Satan-led rebellion against the Lord.

He wins; easily. It marks the completion of Jesus mission to redeem mankind and creation. It sets the stage for the creation of a new earth and heavens.

Before the restoration of creation, there is another, final, somber resurrection. All nonbelievers from throughout time will be raised to be judged. Rejectors of God's grace, they will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire for an eternity of conscious torment.

(I'd encourage you to read the twentieth chapter of the Revelation. It's only fifteen verses, but it fully explains these literal, future events).

1Co 15:26 The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death.

1Co 15:27 For "HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET..."

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"Death" is here personified as a tyrant, exercising despotic power over the human race; and "he" is to be subdued. Once the wicked dead are raised, no one will ever sin or die, ever again, on into eternity.

1Co 15:27 For "HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET." But when He says "all things are put under *Him*," *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

1Co 15:28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Paul gives us commentary on this quote from the Psalms. It is insight into the cooperation between God the Father and God the Son with regard to the plan of redeeming creation and mankind. As one commentator put it, "Paul's point is that in raising Jesus Christ from the dead, God the Father has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus of God's being once again, as in eternity past, "all in all."

In other words, all will be right with the universe, between God and His creation, as God originally intended.

The next few verses, twenty-nine through thirty-two, are a series of rhetorical questions that show the inconsistency of preaching that there is no resurrection from the dead.

1Co 15:29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

Paul, Paul, Paul. Didn't you know how much trouble this verse would cause? That Mormons, for instance, would perform proxy baptisms for dead people, thinking that it gives them opportunity to enter in to the Kingdom?



No one has a completely satisfactory answer to what, exactly, was going on. I came across the following helpful commentary:

“An examination of the sources shows that this referred to baptism **of** persons who had just died, not proxy baptisms **for** them. There is no evidence of proxy baptisms **for** the dead in the early Church, nor is this done in modern mainstream Christianity, whether Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or any Protestant churches.”

The Corinthians *may* have been doing proxy baptisms. If they were, Paul’s lack of condemnation of it here doesn’t mean that he approved of it.

Why didn’t Paul take time to discuss baptism? He didn’t have to. The Corinthians knew his teaching on water baptism. He’d been with them teaching eighteen months.

As far as it concerns us, we have a ton of information elsewhere on water baptism by which to dismiss this as a practice. If you take all of the teaching on water baptism into account, you find that it is to follow conversion, not to precede it. As a ritual, it does not save the living or the deceased. As far as deceased individuals...

It is appointed to man once to die, and then comes judgment. There is no second chance.

Paul’s point here is simply this: If you really disbelieved in the resurrection of believers, you wouldn’t bother to baptize them as a sort of last rites, or second chance.

1Co 15:30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?

What an understatement about the hazards of being an itinerant apostle. Beaten, stoned, robbed, shipwrecked, jailed. All in a days work. Why do it? In

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another place, Paul said, "to live is Christ, to die is gain." He lived to serve, and looked forward to death and resurrection.

1Co 15:31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

Paul could boast about them. He had preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. They were saved.

"I die daily." Paul would agree with Captain Barbossa, who said, "Dying is the day worth living for." Do **we** agree?

1Co 15:32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, "LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE!"

An angry mob, compared to wild "beasts," had desired to tear Paul apart in Ephesus. What motivated him to keep going on and face those kind of daily dangers? The fact he would "rise" and stand before his Lord.

Otherwise you might as well live as if life were all about physical pleasure. In fact, denying a physical resurrection was a step in that direction. If only your spirit matters, it can be argued that it doesn't matter what you do with your body. You end up in sin.

1Co 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

This is a good stand-alone verse for raising your kids. To the Corinthians Paul was saying, "You are adopting a Greek philosophy. Adding that to the Gospel can only corrupt your behavior."



1Co 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

Drift away from thinking about the eternal and you will lose a sense of urgency to grow in "righteousness." And you will find yourself more-and-more unconcerned about the lost - those who "do not have the knowledge of God."

So... How are we more like Charles Atlas?? Reflect on how different our lives are knowing we *will* be raptured or resurrected:

- Reflecting back on verse seventeen... we're no longer in our sins. We're forgiven. And we have power to say "No" to sin.
- Reflecting back on verse eighteen... We have assurance we will be reunited with our deceased believing loved ones.
- Reflecting back on verse twenty-three... We have the joyful urgency of knowing Jesus could return for His church at any moment.
- Reflecting back on verses twenty-four through twenty-eight, we know the end of the story. It all works out. There will be a restored creation with no sin or death or enemies to cause its fall.
- Reflecting back on verses thirty through thirty-three... No matter what happens in the world, or in your world, you can live for Jesus, knowing that if you die, you gain.
- Reflecting back on verse thirty-four... We have a commission to share the simple Gospel simply. God has partnered with us, empowered us.

We are of all men *not* the most pitiable, but the most hopeful.

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