

FIRST CORINTHIANS

What If Christ Is Not Risen? I Corinthians 15:12-19

On June 21, 1924, the Soviet Congress issued a declaration at the death of Lenin. It read, "His vision was colossal; his intelligence in organizing the masses was beyond belief; he was the lord of the new humanity; the savior of the world." This is quite a mouthful to say about any man, but notice the little word "was." In it we see the end of what some would call a great man. Lenin is a dead man, and the claims made about him will pass off the scene of history in a few short years (if they have not already). A hundred years from now no one will really care about a famous man named Lenin. Yet, almost two thousand years ago, another declaration was made at the tomb of Jesus. An angel said, "He is not here, for He is risen!" Jesus is risen, not has risen. He is alive. He is changing men and woman two thousand years after His death. Why? Because Jesus Christ, not Lenin, is Lord of the universe and Savior of the world because He was resurrected from the dead and is alive today.

In spite of all the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ, men still wrestle with the question, "What if Christ is not risen?" Perhaps in a weak moment of faith a Christian might say to himself; "How do I know for sure the resurrection is true? What if it never happened? What if it is only a hoax? Is it a piper's dream? Is it only wishful thinking?" These are normal doubts that may come to a Christian at any time, especially if he or she is in a spiritually low period. In a moment of doubt, we may reason, "Surely, if there is no resurrection of Christ, there is still the same loving God, the same precious Jesus, with His practical teachings and sacrificial death, and there is still the hope of some kind of life after death." However, the Apostle Paul would take a strong opposition to this kind of reasoning. He would argue that the resurrection of Christ is fundamental to true Christianity, and without this true historical fact, there is no Christianity at all.

What Paul will do in I Corinthians 15:12-19 is show the logical consequences of denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The "what if?" question is not just a twentieth century problem; it was also a first century problem which cropped up in the church at Corinth. In this section of Scripture, Paul's whole method of reasoning is, "What do we give up if the resurrection is not true? He argues from a negative point of view, assuming certain false presuppositions to prove that Christ did rise from the dead and Christians, too, shall rise from the dead. Paul's argument demands concentration, but he devastates those who would say they are Christians and deny the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

THE ILLOGICAL CONCLUSION OF THE CORINTHIANS 15:12

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? These Corinthians had wrongly concluded that there was no general resurrection of Christians at the Second Advent of Christ.

It is not hard to understand why they would draw this conclusion if you understand Greek philosophy. The Corinthians had succumbed to the fact there would be no resurrection of Christians at the Second Advent because this is what the unbelieving Greek philosophers taught. They held that the spirit part of man survives after death in some eternal oblivion, but the body goes to the grave and turns to dust, never to be raised. These philosophers taught that the body was essentially evil and that it was a prison for the spirit. When death came, the spirit was freed and liberated from the sinful body which was dead and forgotten. In one respect, a Greek could welcome death because it was the liberation of the spirit from the body. The idea of a literal resurrection of the body was offensive to the natural Greek mind. These Corinthian Christians had bought the reasoning that there was no bodily resurrection. They were not denying life after death but were denying bodily resurrection. Greek philosophers talked of the resurrection of the body as "the hope of swine."

It was ridiculous to think there was no resurrection of Christians even though Christ was raised from the dead. He was proof positive that bodily resurrection is possible. Christ had been seen by the Apostles, individually and collectively, by men and women, singly and in groups, and even by five hundred people at one time. He was obviously raised from the dead, and this, of course, would necessitate a resurrection of all Christians because all share in his death, burial and resurrection. It was totally illogical to deny the resurrection of all Christians if Christ Himself was raised from the dead because He was the "first fruits" of all resurrection.

LOGICALLY, IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION, THEN CHRIST IS NOT RAISED 15:13

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. To deny a general resurrection of all Christians is to deny the specific resurrection of Christ. If human bodies do not survive death as the Greek philosophers claimed, then Christ's body did not survive death and there is no resurrection of Christ. It is impossible to argue that Christ rose but Christians cannot either -- both will be resurrected or neither will be resurrected.

If Christ is not raised, there is not the slightest hope of our resurrection; but if Christ is risen, there certainly is the possibility that we can be raised as well.

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection of Christ? We give up any hope of any life after death because, for the Christians, there is no life after death apart from the resurrection. The resurrection makes a difference!

LOGICALLY, IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, THEN THERE IS NO GOSPEL MESSAGE AND FAITH IS EMPTY 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. In verses 14-19, Paul shows the logical consequences of denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He answers the question, "What if?" He attempts to show what life would be like for the Christian if Christ had not been raised from the dead.

Paul makes it clear that if Christ were not raised, then the apostolic message was empty of content, without substance, totally useless. He preached that Jesus Christ was Savior, Lord, Priest and King and that He came to die for sinful men and give them eternal life here and bring them into His kingdom at the Second Advent. But all Christ's works, according to the apostolic message, were validated by His resurrection from the dead.

If Christ be not raised, then Christian preaching is not real, not based on fact, not based on historical reality, and is absolutely meaningless. If the resurrection is not true, then Christianity is a piper's dream, a hoax, a mirage and a bunch of wishful thinking by deluded people.

Take out the resurrection of Jesus, and there is nothing left on which to rest faith - only the decomposing corpse of an itinerant Jewish carpenter-turned rabbi (Prior, I Corinthians).

What do we give up if the resurrection of Christ did not happen? We give up Christian integrity. We must say that Christ, the Apostles, the great preachers of the Church and all Christians have lied about Christ. All preaching of the apostolic faith has been untrustworthy and a waste of time. Yet, the resurrection does make a difference!

Furthermore, Paul tells us if Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith as Christians is vain, empty, void of substance; that is, faith is placed in a myth or an untruth. It is, therefore, not based in a real Christ who lived, died and was raised from the dead, but faith is a psychological religious experience with no historical, real content. The whole Christian life is a worthless, useless existential superstition and a meaningless deception if Christ be not raised from the dead. Faith would be vain. Christianity would be a religious game. Life would be reduced to grim, stark realities, with no hope.

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection? We give up a living faith based on historical fact. For all practical purposes, we give up Christianity. The resurrection does make a difference!

LOGICALLY, IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, THEN THE APOSTLES ARE LIARS 15:15-16

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. In the Book of Acts, the Apostles declared the resurrection of Christ with great authority and power. Acts makes mention of the resurrection 145 times. It was the focal point of early church preaching. The message was, "He has risen; we have seen Him; He is Lord and Savior!" If the resurrection is not true, then the Apostles were the world's greatest liars. If there is no resurrection, they cannot be considered trustworthy, honorable and sincere men, but deceivers. They are hypocrites who have led multiple millions into gross darkness and great error. God declared the resurrection to be truth and apart of His plan for this world. But if it did not occur,

the Apostles were preaching against God's plans and purposes. However, the Bible says God has declared the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the Apostles and all Christians are in accord with His plan and purpose in declaring to men the resurrected Christ. This was the apostolic message.

Isn't it odd that many local churches call themselves St. Thomas, or St. Andrew or St.

Mark, using apostolic names, and yet many who make up these churches deny the bodily resurrection of Christ? This is real irony.

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection? We give up our friendship with God and become His most ardent enemies because we are saying that He has not raised Christ when He said He has raised Christ. The resurrection makes a difference!

LOGICALLY, IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, THEN CHRISTIANS ARE YET IN THEIR SINS
15:17

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. -. The resurrection of Christ demonstrated historically that the sacrifice of Christ for sin was sufficient and satisfactory and accepted by God. It was God's, "Amen," to Christ's, "It is finished." Yet, if Christ be not risen, then His death was invalidated. We are still in our sins. We still must face the anger of a wrathful God. We will experience no mercy, no love, no compassion, no forgiveness from God. When we stand before Him, we will get everything that we deserve for every evil action, thought or motive we have done or had if Christ be not raised.

Faith is worthless if there is no resurrection. We are devoid of any salvation. We have no King, no Lord of the universe and no Savior of the world.

If he was not raised from the dead, he is not Lord of anything. If life here on this earth is all there is, it makes no sense to base our hope on the groundless promises of one who made empty assertions about eternity. If the Christian faith is thus based on an empty gospel and a fraudulent savior, "anybody is better off than the Christian." (Prior, I Corinthians).

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection? We give up salvation. The resurrection does make a difference!

LOGICALLY, IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, THEN DEAD CHRISTIANS HAVE PERISHED
15:18

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If Christ be not risen, then all Christians who have died or will die have no hope after the grave. At the moment of death, they shift discover they have been tricked, duped, deluded, as they pass into everlasting torment. Without the resurrection, there is no victory over sin and no triumph over death. Without the resurrection, we have only despair in our lives; death will swallow up all.

If Christ be not risen, then all of our loved ones who have gone on to be with the Lord (or that we thought went to be with the Lord), whom we had hoped to meet again, we will

never see again. Our children, our parents, our relatives, our friends who have died have all perished if there is no resurrection.

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection? We give up any hope of life beyond the grave. Death, therefore, becomes the most dreaded event in a person's life because it ends life.

The resurrection makes a difference!

LOGICALLY, IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, THEN CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PITIED 15:19

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. —A Christian is a person who has committed everything to the resurrected Christ. For Christ, he suffers; because of Christ, he denies himself; to Christ, he has given himself for service. Yet, if Christ be not risen, then He is not Savior or Lord. No one, therefore, is to be pitied more than a Christian because he or she has served, sacrificed and suffered for a Christ who does not exist. Christians would be the most duped and gullible people on the face of the earth. They have believed things that are not true and lived a life for no real purpose. Besides all that, the Christian has lost all that so-called worldly fun that he might have had in his lifetime if Christ be not raised.

Christians are to be pitied if Christ is not raised, for, thinking they had the truth, they have been deceived. They must, therefore, return to a life of pessimism, despair and darkness. Without the resurrection, Christianity crumbles, and the Christian is left in utter despair.

What do we give up if we deny the resurrection? We give up life with meaning, purpose, hope and excitement. The resurrection does make a difference !

All the talk of Christ dying for our sins in accordance with the scriptures becomes meaningless, if in fact he stayed dead (Prior, I Corinthians).

I read recently about an elderly church-goer who heard a modern skeptic talk about the resurrection on a radio program. She concluded that everything she had believed about orthodox Christianity was unreliable, untrue or a hoax. She, in despair, committed suicide.

CONCLUSION

There is a positive as well as a negative logic to the resurrection of Christ. Since Christ is raised, then our preaching is not useless and empty, the Apostles are true witnesses who can be trusted, our sins have been atoned for and we are forgiven, death has not triumphed over our loved ones and we will see them again, and life has become meaningful and full of purpose. Furthermore, since the resurrection is true, then the Christian is the most envied person on the face of the earth, for when he or she dies there will be certainty that the soul and spirit go immediately to be with Christ and will return to unite with the resurrected body at the second coming of Christ. Then the resurrected and glorified body will be with Christ for all eternity. This concept of resurrection can only bring hope, encouragement and anticipation of this blessed event, and the Christian can say, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Tertullian and later John Wesley made an observation about Christians. They said, "Our people die well."

If you do not believe in Christ, I need to warn you that you too shall be resurrected someday, but it will be a resurrection unto judgment and damnation.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (Jn. 5:28-29).

Will you be in the resurrection unto life or the resurrection unto condemnation? That will be determined on the basis of whether you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior for sin and as the resurrected Lord. If you do that, then you will produce good spiritual works and will be part of the resurrection unto life.

You cannot get to heaven without bowing to the resurrected Christ who saves any and all who come to Him by filth, asking Him for forgiveness of sins based on His finished work for sin at the Cross. Remember, the resurrection is God's, "Amen" to Christ's, "it is finished."