

FIRST CORINTHIANS

The Resurrection And The End Of The World I Corinthians 15:20-34

Our modern society is becoming increasingly fascinated with the whole concept of death. Many books have been written on the subject. As we approach Halloween, the emphasis is upon death. Even in secular circles there is much talk about death. Seminars on death and dying are being taught everywhere. It is chic to be part of a Hemlock society. Testimonies are given by people who have supposedly died and come back to life again. Death is becoming a preoccupation with many, and that is good, because the more people think about death, the more they will think about the answer for life after death. Death is the last enemy to be conquered, and I Corinthians 15 tells us that only Christ can conquer this tenacious enemy.

Someone has said the two things men cannot avoid are death and taxes. We may sometimes avoid paying taxes, but no one will avoid growing old and dying. Death is an enemy. We may try to avoid it, rationalize it, or cover it up, but death is an inevitable fact of life. For those who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord, death is an enemy, but for the Christian, death is a friend to usher us into the presence of God forever.

The Corinthians were wrestling with the whole subject of death, but some had fallen into a very subtle, yet serious, doctrinal error. They, following the teaching of ancient Greek philosophers, had bought the reasoning that there would be no resurrection of any human body after death. The Greeks believed the sinful body was a prison for the spirit. At death, the spirit was freed from the sinful body, never again to return to it. The human body simply decomposed into dust. Greeks did not deny some kind of life after death for the spirit of man in some eternal oblivion, but the whole idea of a bodily resurrection was abhorrent to them. Because the body was unimportant and the spirit all important, the Greeks often misused their bodies in sinful practices. They reasoned if the body is not important, if there is no resurrection, then one better get all the pleasure he can for this body right now in this life.

"Well," you say, "How does that first century philosophy apply to us today?" Every single day this ancient Greek philosophy is coming into your home by way of TV. The Madison Avenue mind changers have convinced 260 million people that we only live life once, so live it with gusto. Get as much fun, pleasure and excitement for the body as possible. Furthermore, the vast majority of modern day cults which are springing up in America today are infested with Eastern Oriental thinking which says that if you are ever to enjoy the delights of the body, now is the time to do it. Their basic premise is that the body is unimportant, but the spirit of man is all important. The spirit, will live on, but the body dies and perishes forever. This worldly philosophy is diametrically opposed to true Christianity. This kind of thinking is the essence of the New Age movement.

ASSURANCES DUE TO THE RESURRECTION 15:20-28

Christ's Resurrection is A Guarantee Of The Christians Resurrection (20)

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. In I Corinthians 15:12-19, the Apostle Paul argued logically as to what would happen to Christians if the resurrection of Jesus Christ were not true. But now in I Corinthians 15:20-28, he gives a note of triumph, for he assumes the resurrection of all true believers, and gives the fulfillment of the whole redemptive purpose of God.

Taking the positive approach, Paul says Christ has risen from the dead, and He has become the first fruits of all Christians who have died. "First fruits" is an Old Testament concept from Leviticus 23. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at Passover time, the Jewish farmer would go out into his fields when the crop was first coming in and would take a small sheaf of grain that was ripe and take it to the temple where the priest would wave it before the Lord. This was a pledge or guarantee of more grain to come. Paul's point is obvious. The resurrection of Christ is a guarantee of the future resurrection of Christians, and Christ's resurrected body is a sample of what our resurrected bodies will be like in the future.

Christ's Resurrection Makes The Christian's Resurrection More Certain Than Death (21-22)

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Paul used an analogy between Adam and Christ, the first Adam and the last Adam. The first Adam, the head of the human race, brought death, spiritual and physical, to all mankind because of his sin. When he sinned, he plunged the whole human race into sin. His sin had far reaching effects upon his posterity. The tragedy of death came through the man Adam, but the triumph of resurrection came through the man Christ Jesus. He brought life through resurrection. The last Adam repaired the evil done by the first Adam.

In Adam all must die. Every person born into this world has a position in Adam as a member of the human race. This position brings spiritual and physical death upon every person born into the human race. Yet in Christ shall be made alive. The "all" are those in Christ, all who have trusted Him as Savior and Lord, all who have been born of God's Spirit. This is a spiritual position and relationship which is entered into by faith in Christ. It involves not natural birth but the new birth. This position in Christ makes a person a member of the new spiritual race, the church of Jesus Christ. Only the Christian will be resurrected to eternal life. The unsaved will be resurrected to eternal 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).

Just as surely as death is at work for all in Adam, so life is at work for all those in Christ. As certain as death is true in Adam, it is more certain that resurrection is true in Christ,

and one day all Christians will be brought into a new quality and level of life that they have never known before.

Christ's Resurrection Assures An Order Of Resurrection (23)

But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. The context of I Corinthians 15 is about the resurrection of Christians. It has nothing to say about the resurrection of non-Christians, but there is a time for that as well in God's program.

There is a divinely arranged order of resurrection. The word "turn" is a military term.

The great Captain, Jesus Christ, comes first, then comes the divisions of God's people, Old Testament and New Testament saints, at the Second Advent. Then, after the millennium, comes the resurrection of all rejecters of Christ throughout history, and this is the resurrection unto judgment.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

A Christian may be asking, "Where do I go if I die as a Christian before Christ comes? Does my soul sleep in the grave?" The Scripture is not as clear as we would like on this issue, but we do not soul sleep.

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philip. 1:23).

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8).

However, it is not as though we will be floating our in space with Christ in disembodied spirits awaiting the resurrection. At death, we pass into eternity, and eternity has no past, present or future. When the believer dies, he steps out of time into eternity, and that first event to await him in time again is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people and the resurrection of the body. Between death and resurrection, the Christian probably has some kind of intermediate body but we can't be absolutely sure.

Christ's Resurrection Will Destroy Death At The End (24-28)

Then the end will come. Christian scholars disagree over the end. Some think the end refers to the end of the world immediately after the return of Christ. Up until then, Christ reigns in this world but then turns the spiritual kingdom over to God, putting down the last enemy, death, before doing so. These theologians are called amillennialists because they believe in no earthly millennial kingdom to be set up in this world after the return of Christ. Other scholars, called premillennialists, think the end refers to the total end of God's program which includes a rule of Jesus Christ over this earth for a thousand years after the Second Advent. It seems to me that the premillennial view has merit here, for the kingdom offered to the Father is not just a spiritual kingdom but a redeemed earthly kingdom sanctified by the reigning Christ for a thousand years.

Verse 23 does not necessarily support a doctrine of the millennium, but it at least allows for it. The adverbs in verses 23b-24a, "then. . . then" often but not always refer to a sequence of events with a period of time in between. Given the substantial gap between Christ's resurrection and his return (v. 23b), it is natural to assume a similar gap prior to the final destruction of all his enemies (v.24a), as Revelation 20 seems to teach. But we cannot be sure, and one's views on numerous other parts of Scripture must be considered before arriving at a position on the millennium (Craig Blomberg, I Corinthians).

When he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. God has had a kingdom rule on the earth from the very beginning, called the mediatorial kingdom, because He is reigning and this mediatorial kingdom was turned over to Christ to administer. This mediatorial kingdom, which is earthly in nature, will find ultimate perfection by the end of the millennium. The millennial reign of Christ will be a time of peace and righteousness. During this period Christ will complete His work of redemption and subdue all enemies. He will abolish all powers whether they be human or demonic.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. Christ reigns now, and the final, earthly phase of His reign will take place after the Second Advent. He will reign over sin, over demonic power, casting them and all who have followed the lie of the Devil that Jesus is not the Christ, the Son of God, the only Savior, into the lake of fire. Then Christ will deliver up the perfected earthly kingdom to God the Father.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Universal death will not be eliminated totally until the final resurrection of unsaved, rejecters of Christ at the end of the millennium when death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire. Then physical death shall be abolished forever. The very last enemy to be destroyed is death.

For he "has put everything under his feet" Now when it says that "everything" has:
been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. God the Father put the running of the administrative affairs, both spiritual and earthly, of the mediatorial kingdom in the hands of

Jesus Christ. When Christ gives this kingdom back to God, then He will have subjected Himself as the Mediator to God the Father. At this time Christ will say to the Father, "I have accomplished all I was supposed to do for the elect of God and for the redemption of the earth. I return the kingdom to You, subjecting Myself as Mediator to Your divine will." Then the redeeming purpose of God's people and the world will have been accomplished. At that time, with sin abolished, the kingdom will be perfect and God will be all in all, reigning supreme in this universe without any enemy opposing Him.

APPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION TO REAL LIFE 15:29-34

Resurrection Motivates Some To Baptize For The Dead (29)

Now if there is no resurrection, what wilt those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? Having proved the certainty of the resurrection and the assurances that go with it, Paul pauses to apply the doctrine to his readers and to remind them that the resurrection is intimately tied up with their motivations and hopes.

The first argument he uses is the puzzling baptism for the dead. Right off it needs to be said that no one knows for sure the meaning of this verse. But we can say this was a practice no doubt as familiar to them as puzzling to us. There are at least forty interpretations. The Mormons, of course, make the baptism for the dead a major part of their false religion. In their temples, they are actually baptizing living Mormons for people who have died without being Mormons. They believe you can go back through history and be baptized for all your ancestors. This is why they keep such accurate genealogies. They believe they can be baptized on behalf of someone who was not a Mormon and the dead person will then be saved. Although I began by saying that no one knows for sure what this verse means, I can tell you for sure what it does not mean. It does not mean what the Mormons believe; that would be salvation by works and proxy, something totally against the teaching of Scripture.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

Furthermore, in the second century of the church, baptism for the dead as practiced by the Marcionites and others was condemned as heretical.

This passage may mean a baptism for believers who died as martyrs before they could be baptized. It may also refer to the baptizing of Christians over the graves of martyred Christians in order to express faith in the resurrection. It may also refer to the baptizing of young believers who fill up the ranks of older believers at death.

It seems there was definitely a ritual going on at Corinth where they were practicing some form of substitutionary baptism for the dead. Possibly, there had entered into their thinking that if a person had believed in Christ and had not been baptized that it was necessary

for someone to take his or her place and submit to the rite of water baptism. It is logical to think if these Corinthians had false teaching about the resurrection, they might also have some false teaching about the baptism for the dead. Notice, Paul seems to separate himself from those who are practicing this by speaking in the third person, referring to them as "those" and "them." The tone of the verse indicates he is not for this ritual. It appears he does not believe this teaching but only uses it for an illustration.

Paul's whole point is that whatever this practice was, it was done with a view to the resurrection of the dead. He says, "Why do you do this practice if there is no resurrection from the dead?"

Resurrection Motivates To Endure Suffering (30-32a)

And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die everyday—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? Paul suffered horribly for Christ. His life was in constant jeopardy. He fought with wild beasts which may mean he was put into the arena as a gladiator. This statement, however, is probably figurative language and means Paul fought off beast-like men at Ephesus who were infuriated because of the gospel and the impact it had on the economy there.

Why would anyone take the trouble to join himself to such a religion as Christianity if death is the end of everything? It would be pure madness to be a Christian if there is no resurrection from the dead. To believe God raises the dead is a tremendous encouragement to endure suffering and even physical affliction right now for the cause of Christ. Whatever Christians have to face, the hope of the resurrection strengthens and motivates them. A Christian can risk his or her life because a Christian knows this life is not the end.

Christians must have a radically different mind-set. Recognizing that a far better life awaits them, they can risk their lives or well-being for the gospel in ways other people would not be willing to emulate. In Christian ethics, physical death cannot be the greatest tragedy that determines correct human behavior. Rather one must ask what is likely to lead to the spiritual salvation of the most number of people and to avoid the physical (and therefore spiritual) deaths of the greatest number of unbelievers (Blomberg, I Corinthians).

Resurrection Motivates To Godly Living (32)

If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." This was the philosophy of Epicureanism in that day. They said the spirit in man is all important, but the body is not important for it is sinful and will rot in the grave. Therefore, life was composed of living it up. Give the body all the pleasure it can get now because after death there is no more pleasure. They took this view because they saw no future for the body but only for the spirit.

The Epicurean philosophy is very widespread in our American society. Most people reason, "Let's have a good time while we live because we will be along time dead." Our society is sold out to materialism and sensualism. Men gratify the flesh because they deny the eternal future of the soul as well as the body. The thinking today is, "Don't bother with giving yourself to and wasting your life on doing things for God. Enjoy yourself. Spend all your time having

fun and pleasure.

Why do men think this way? They have no sense of the eternal destiny for the spirit or the body. Apart from the resurrection, life has no meaning; it is useless and without purpose. If there is no God, no Christ, no salvation and no resurrection, let us live it up. Let us live a life that satisfies only the flesh. Without the resurrection, man sinks to the level of a brute, living only for self and pleasure.

Because of the resurrection, the Christian has a high view of the importance of the human body. He is therefore motivated to live a holy life, treating his body with respect and living in a way which would be pleasing to Christ. He can give up certain so-called worldly pleasures because he knows the grave does not end it all. A Christian is a person who has heard the drumbeat of another world, so he does not keep step with the drumbeat of this world. The world says to feed the body all the pleasure, lust and sin it can take because we only go around life once. The Christian says we should keep the human body clean, pure and holy and give it only the legitimate pleasures which God approves, for the body is to be treated with respect, honor and dignity because of future resurrection.

But increasingly, we are seeing a culture that refuses to put on the brakes at all. The "Baby Boomers," including many professing Christians, are in debt up to their eyeballs. Advertisements bombard us daily with what we have to have immediately. Sexual morals continue to deteriorate, so that what was unthinkable for most non-Christians in another era—addiction to pornography, repeated acts of adultery, or incestuous behavior—is now widely practiced, even at times among those who profess to be born again (Blomberg, I Corinthians).

Resurrection Motivates To A Separated Life (33-34)

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for then are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame. These Corinthians were not to be deceived and led astray by false teaching and philosophy on the resurrection from the dead. Some of these Christians had been running in bad company with professing Christians who were teaching false doctrine. They had been associating with cynics and skeptics about the resurrection of the body. They had begun to accept the "live it up" attitude of the false teachers. Instead of giving themselves to service for Christ so as to heal those hurting with spiritual pain by the Word of God and love, they had accepted the philosophy, "The body is not important. Feed the flesh. Enjoy yourself for that is the essence of life."

Paul did not want them to stop associating with unbelievers but with so-called professing Christians and false teachers. We must reach the unsaved world for Christ and the only way to do that is to be among them and give them the message of Christ on a level they can understand. Christians are only commanded to separate from professing Christians who are in sin or doctrinal error.

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (II Thess. 3:14-15).

This verse clearly tells us who we choose as our friends and who we run with in the pack will affect our thoughts, habits and life style. Goethe once said, "Tell me with whom thou art found and I will tell thee who thou art." Surely this also tells us that wrong doctrine produces wrong conduct in the life of a Christian.

These Corinthians were to come out of the drunken stupor they seemed to be in concerning the resurrection of the body. They were to clear up their heads of doctrinal error and walk rightly before the Lord. They were to stop sinning because doctrinal error is sin and always leads to sin. Some in that church at Corinth had no knowledge of God. Their denial of bodily resurrection showed that they had no real knowledge of God. If they did not repent of this error, there was no evidence at all that they were saved, it was a shame there were unbelievers in the Corinthians assembly with their false teaching and they were leading many true Christians astray.

It is a shame to any congregation of believers when there is serious doctrinal error, where false teachers are in their midst when Christians are leading self lives, indulging the body with all kinds of sinful pleasures. When Christians live like the world around them, the church is dead or dying. It must be said that this describes many so-called Christian churches in America How sad!

CONCLUSION

Are you a Christian? If not, did you know that one day after you die you too will get a resurrected body? it is God's plan to raise from the dead every person who has ever lived. However, some resurrected bodies will have eternal existence and others will have eternal lit Those who have believed in Christ in this life will receive bodies with eternal life and they will be taken into heaven. Those who have rejected Christ will receive bodies with eternal existence and will be thrown into the lake of fire. Where will you and your eternal body spend eternity? Heaven or hell? That will be determined by what you do with Jesus Christ in this life. The decision is yours.