

CAN I BELIEVE IN RESURRECTION?

1 Corinthians 15:1-6; 12-18; 50-58

Nobody likes to talk about death. Nobody! It is a depressing subject and we don't like to be depressed. Yet death has been inevitable for every human being throughout the history of mankind with the notable exceptions of Elijah and Enoch. We have come to more-or-less accept death as something that is going to happen and have classified it as part of the natural order of things. We tend to think that death is more tragic for a younger person than for an older person, more tragic for the rich and famous than for the poor and unknown. To most, regardless of age or station in life, death is an enemy and for those few that, in death, find some relief from suffering, it is not the alternative of choice if people could really have their way. Ultimately, we all want to find some way to defeat the enemy of life, some way to have victory over death.

It Is the Gospel: 15:1-6

¹Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 (NASB95)

The last problem Paul dealt with was the confusion of the Corinthians over the doctrine of resurrection. This was particularly confusing to the pagan, for resurrection was a concept totally foreign to Greek thought. Apparently, they believed that Christ was bodily resurrected but had problems believing in the bodily resurrection of others. Some of the Christians at Corinth had been claiming that the resurrection of the dead was nothing more than the experience of being born again of the Spirit of God and that no bodily resurrection would happen. Paul started his “proof” of the doctrine of resurrection with their own salvation. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then they had believed in vain and they had no salvation. There are many people today that do not believe there will be a resurrection when Jesus Christ returns. Some of these same ones don't believe that Jesus is going to return. Paul wanted to correct the error of such thinking.

Paul used this part of his letter to them to re-teach and to remind them of the original message he had shared when he introduced God's plan of salvation. This message is the “good news” or the gospel because it laid out the basis of our salvation and our trust in this good news is the only requirement for us to be saved.

The second “proof” Paul used was the Scripture and the agreement of what had happened with the prophecies. It is helpful to go over the main points that Paul repeated in his letter. First and foremost importance is that Christ died for our sins. This fact is foundational and it is the major event in all of history. It is that to which the law and the prophets pointed throughout the time God has been dealing with man. We see it in the account of what happened in the garden of Eden (slaying of the animal to make a covering for Adam and Eve), we see it in God's test of Abraham (the sacrifice of Isaac), and we see in most of the ceremonial rituals involving sacrifices for sins. The fact that Christ died for our sins is the only way to avoid the Law of Sin and Death (the soul that sins will die).

The second point Paul made regarding Scriptural proof was that Jesus was buried. This fact is important in that it confirms the prophecy in several places in the Old Testament. David had written in Psalm 16:10, “*you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy*

One see decay.” Also in Isa 53:9 “*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.*” The other significant thing about the burial is that it was confirmation He was dead.

The third point of the good news was that Christ rose from the grave on the third day. The significance of this event goes beyond the confirmation of the Scriptures but is evidence that He lives and that He has conquered death and the grave. The argument that some have made is that if Christ could not conquer death and the grave, then He would have no power to save us.

The “third day” reference can be found in many of the Old Testament references pointing to the completed work of Christ. The Psalm 16 reference to the body not seeing decay was understood to mean that the time He was in the grave could not have been more than three days. In addition, there was the reference to Jonah in the belly of the fish that Jesus mentioned. The time between God’s commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son up to the point of his being spared was three days. There is a reference in Hosea 6:2 that says “*After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.*”

The third proof that Paul offered was the many witnesses who saw Christ following the resurrection. The Corinthians knew Peter and Paul started with his name since he was the first of the apostles who saw the risen Lord. He then mentioned many others (more than 500) who could still give testimony to what they saw.

It Is Reasonable: 15:12-18

¹²Now 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? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 1 Corinthians 15:12-18 (NASB95)

The Greeks prided themselves in being logical in their approach to life. So, Paul appealed to logic. The idea of resurrection was generally rejected by those in the pagan world. However, the Christians at Corinth did accept the truth of the resurrection of Christ. Paul then argued that the fact Christ rose from the dead proved that resurrection is a reality. The consequences of believing that there will be no resurrection of the dead for believers (those who are in Christ) is that if there is no resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from death. If Jesus did not rise from death, then the gospel message is empty and the faith that people have placed in that message is also empty. If our faith has no power, then we are still in our sins and all that have put their trust in Christ that had already died have perished. Not only that, we also will perish because we have no means by which to be saved. Paul could not accept the consequence of such belief. Those that were claiming that a physical resurrection would not take place had not taken into account all the consequences of the acceptance of such a belief. They would not want to accept the consequences of those that put their trust in Christ as having perished in their belief, or that faith has no power in our lives, or that we are still in our sins after having accepted the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

The finishing touches on this logic exercise is found in verses 20-22.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 1 Cor 15:20-22 (NIV)

Here is the affirmation of the faith that every Christian must have: "Christ IS risen from the dead!" Since He has risen, then we too shall rise. It was by the sin of Adam that the curse of sin and death (the soul that sins shall die) passed upon all mankind, and just as Adam died, all

that are of Adam must die. In the same way, by the obedience of Jesus, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (the blessing of life eternal) passed upon all that will believe, and just as Jesus was raised from death, so also will we be resurrected.

It Is Certain: 15:50-58

⁵⁰Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.” ⁵⁵“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (NASB95)

When most people think of resurrection, they are thinking in terms of “reconstruction” of the body parts (even down to the very atoms) of the original body. This idea was what the logical Greeks were struggling with in accepting the concept of resurrection. Many people today think of resurrection as reconstruction. Nowhere in Scripture does it teach that we will be reconstructed. It is buried as a physical body and it will be raised as a spiritual body. Some have argued that there is continuity in that it will belong to you but there is not identity in that it is not the same body – it has been transformed.

This may be what Paul meant when he stated that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. If “flesh and blood” simply means that which is “physical,” then we can see that anything in the physical world is perishable or capable of being corrupted and, therefore, would not be suitable for eternity or the heavenly realm. You can find arguments by some that God can create a material body that will not be subject to corruption or decay and, therefore, it would be suitable to occupy heaven and live forever and to “house” or be the abode of our immortal spirits. The bottom line is that we do NOT know what it will be like beyond the assertion that it will be like that of the resurrected body of Christ.

When will this happen? The Scripture clearly states that it will be at the last trumpet. At that time, the dead (bodies) will be raised (as incorruptible entities) and those who are still alive will be transformed or change instantaneously. If this last trumpet is related to the seven trumpets that will be sounded in the last days, then this resurrection/transformation of bodies will follow immediately when the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet. We see in Revelation 11:15 “*And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*” We can then combine this with 1Thess 4:16 “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*” Most people would associate this with the rapture of the church. This means that all who have died and all who will die up to that point do NOT have a spiritual body. They are still waiting for that to happen.

If we read this passage literally, Paul is saying that only then will there be fulfillment of the saying that “death is swallowed up in victory.” The reason is that death is the ultimate corruption and when all those in Christ will have “put on” that which is imperishable, then we are no longer subject to the corruption (death) that came upon the creation because of sin.

Paul is giving us the means by which death will be defeated. We will change that which is corruptible for that which is incorruptible. We will change that which is mortal for that which

is immortal. Then death will be defeated. The physical bodies that we now have are of the nature as that of Adam and these will be replaced with spiritual bodies that are of the same kind as that of the resurrected Christ.

As if Paul is taunting death and the grave, he asks "where is your power to hurt" and "where is there any ability to win?" In the resurrection, there will be no power of sin and those that are resurrected will live under the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That is a glorious hope and this hope will influence our lives in the present.

Just to be more complete regarding this subject, there will also be a resurrection of all mankind. In Acts 24:15 we see there will a resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust. The resurrection of the just is generally accepted to be at the beginning of the millennial reign and the resurrection of the unjust will be at the end of that time and before the Day of Judgment before the Great White Throne. While the just shall be raised with a body that is like that of Christ, the unjust have no such promise. On the contrary, it was expressly predicted that "some shall awake to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt;" – not to *annihilation* as an everlasting death opposed to the everlasting life, but to *shame* and *everlasting contempt*, which must imply continued conscious existence. In John chapter 5 we find Jesus saying "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live;"-- which may refer, and probably does chiefly refer, to a moral and spiritual resurrection; --expressly and solemnly adds: "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming (he does not add, *and now is*), in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:25, 28, 29).

So many times Christians become discouraged when things don't go the way they had anticipated. It is easy to forget that God is in control and that victory belongs to God – He wins and we win, too, because we are in Him. Knowing this, we keep on course, not moving away from what God has called us to do. Why? Because whatever the task that we do for God, it will be of benefit somehow, someway. It will not be in vain, empty, or without power.