

Challenges Christians Face

The Hope of the Christian's Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

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The Hope of the Christian's Resurrection

Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of what happens to our bodies when we die. There are some who believe that the bodies of Christians are not resurrected. Let's learn about this in a message I am calling, "The Hope of the Christian's Resurrection."

Let's read 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 Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

Introduction

What happens to a person when he dies?

There are many different views in our culture about what happens to a person when he dies. I remember the days following 9-11. Americans said that the terrorists who hijacked the planes on that day went to hell. Muslims, on the other hand, said that the hijackers went straight to paradise where they received 72 virgins.

Generally, when a person who is loved, admired, or appreciated dies, she is said to go to heaven. But, if the person is not loved, admired, or appreciated, he is thought to go to hell.

Some in our culture have taught what is known as “soul sleep.” At death the body stops functioning and eventually disintegrates, while the soul or spirit sleeps.

Materialists believe in total extinction, that is, complete annihilation. Neither the body nor the soul survives after death.

Some, like John Stott, believe in eventual annihilation. The soul survives after death and will suffer torment in hell, but will, at some distant future point, eventually be annihilated.

Some believe in reincarnation. At death the body ceases to exist and eventually disintegrates. However, the soul is set free from the body, and is then attached to another living being. So, the soul passes from human to animal or from animal to human.

Others believe in what is generally described as absorption, in which the spirit, or at least a certain part of the spirit, returns back to its source and is absorbed back into the ultimate divine mind or being.

Some of the confusion over what happens to us when we die can be attributed to the Greek concept known as “dualism.” Dualism considered everything spiritual to be intrinsically good and everything physical to be intrinsically evil.

This philosophy was present in Corinth at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians. There was a common view that a resurrected body after death was repugnant. The Greeks had bought into the view that their bodies were the problem, which caused them sin, suffering, and misery. They were looking forward to becoming only spiritual beings in which they were no longer shackled to their physical bodies.

So, Paul addressed the issue of what happens to our bodies when we die. He addressed those who opposed the idea of our bodies being resurrected into glorified bodies. He wanted them to understand the hope that Christians have regarding the resurrection.

Lesson

So, in our lesson today we learn about the hope of the Christian's resurrection.

Let's learn about this as follows:

1. The Claim of No Resurrection (15:12-13, 16).
2. The Consequences of No Resurrection (15:14-15, 17-19).

I. The Claim of No Resurrection (15:12-13, 16)

First, let's look at the claim of no resurrection.

Paul began by examining their claim that there was no resurrection of the body. And he did so by pointing out that their claim was inconsistent and illogical.

A. *The Claim Is Inconsistent (15:12)*

First, notice that the claim is inconsistent.

Paul said in verse 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?”**

The Corinthians apparently believed that Christ had risen bodily from the dead. Remember, Paul had said to them at the start of the chapter, in verses 1-2a, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, *which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved . . .*” (emphasis mine). Clearly, Paul believed that they were saved.

So, what was the gospel the Corinthians received? Paul said in verses 3-4, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, *that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .*”

Paul was saying that it was inconsistent for them to believe that **Christ was raised from the dead** and for them to **say** also

that there is no resurrection of the dead. Clearly, there was a resurrection from the dead—Christ!

B. The Claim Is Illogical (15:13, 16)

And second, notice that the claim is illogical.

Paul pressed the point. Either there is a resurrection, or there is no resurrection.

And so he said in verse 13: **“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.”** Paul repeated this point in verse 16: **“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.”**

In the first part of this chapter Paul set out detailed evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Clearly, it was illogical to claim that there was no resurrection when Christ did in fact rise from the dead!

II. The Consequences of No Resurrection (15:14-15, 17-19)

Second, let's look at the consequences of no resurrection.

Paul wanted his readers to understand that there are six significant consequences if there is no resurrection of the body.

A. Unproductive Preaching (15:14a)

The first consequence of no resurrection is unproductive preaching.

Paul said in verse 14a: **“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. . . .”**

The Greek word for **vain** (*kenos*) means “without result, without effect, or without purpose.”¹

Paul has just said in the previous paragraph that the heart of the gospel—the good news—is Christ's death and resurrection on

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996).

our behalf. He said, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . .” (15:3-4). If **Christ** had **not been raised** from the dead, he would not have conquered sin or death or hell, and there would be no good news.

Therefore, because there would be no good news to share, our preaching would be unproductive. We would be just like all liberal preachers who say that Jesus is a great moral teacher, and that we can learn a lot from his teaching and his example. However, they miss the point that makes Jesus unique—he has been raised from the dead! He is alive! He is our Savior and Lord!

B. Unfounded Faith (15:14b, 17a)

The second consequence of no resurrection is unfounded faith.

Paul said in verse 14b: “And if Christ has not been raised, then. . . **your faith is in vain.**” He said essentially the same thing in verse 17a: “**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. . . .**”

The Greek word for **futile** (*mataios*) means “useless, futile, or empty.”²

Believing in a Savior who did not rise from the dead would be utterly useless. There would be no foundation to our faith; hence an unfounded faith.

I became a Christian when I was nineteen years old. God started working in my life in a very pointed way about six months earlier. My brother and best friend often talked to me about Jesus and the gospel. One of the reasons I took so long to come to faith is because I wanted to know for sure that Jesus really was alive. I did not want to put my faith in Christ only to find out later that he was not who he claimed to be and was not risen from the dead. I under-

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996).

stood that no one knowingly believes a lie.

Well, thirty-six years ago I put my faith in Jesus Christ. I believed that he really did rise again from the dead. And in all my studies since then my conviction has only grown stronger that Jesus is as alive today as you and I are!

But, if Christ had not been raised from the dead, my faith would be vain and futile.

C. Untrue Witness (15:15)

The third consequence of no resurrection is untrue witness.

Paul said in verse 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.”**

If there is no such thing as resurrection of the dead, then every person who claimed to have seen the risen Christ, such as Peter, the twelve, the five hundred brothers, James, all the apostles, and Paul (cf. 15:5-8), are all liars. Furthermore, everyone who **testified about God that he raised Christ** from the dead, would also be untrue witnesses.

It is bad enough to believe a lie. All of us at some point or another believe something that turns out not to be true.

On Sunday, October 30, 1938, millions of radio listeners in this country were shocked when radio news alerts announced the arrival of Martians. They panicked when they learned of the Martians' ferocious and seemingly unstoppable attack on Earth. It was reported that the Martians had landed at 8:50 p.m. on a farm in the neighborhood of Grovers Mill, New Jersey, just twenty-two miles from Trenton. Initial reports said that at least forty people, including six state troopers, were lying dead in a field east of Grovers Mill, their bodies burned and distorted beyond all possible recognition. Many people ran out of their homes screaming while others packed up their cars and fled.

It turned out that what the radio listeners heard was a portion

of Orson Welles' famous adaptation of the well-known book titled, *War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. Remember that there was no TV yet, and people used to listen to the radio for entertainment. Orson Welles brilliantly transformed *War of the Worlds* into a radio play in such a way that listeners thought that the regular radio program was being interrupted by the startling news of the Martians' attack. And, as I said, millions of people believed that the attack was really happening!

But, as bad as it is to believe a lie, it is far worse to promote a lie! And that is Paul's point. We are **misrepresenting God** when we testify that **he raised Christ** from the dead, if **he did not raise** him from the dead. To do so is to be an untrue witness.

D. Unforgiven Sins (15:17b)

The fourth consequence of no resurrection is unforgiven sins.

Paul said in verse 17b: "And if Christ has not been raised, . . . **you are still in your sins.**"

Paul is indicating that consequences are even worse than one might think. Christians are no better off than non-Christians. The phrase, "**you are still in your sins,**" means that a person is not a Christian.

Suppose you were not feeling well. You go to the doctor and he runs a battery of tests. Eventually, you learn that you have cancer. You experience a whole range of varying emotions. After a while you want to know whether there is a treatment for the cancer that you have. You learn that there is treatment available, and, as soon as possible, you begin your treatment. Once your treatment is complete, you learn that your body seems to be free from the cancer. Over the coming years you will continue to see the doctor to make sure that you are still free from cancer.

Now, what is my point in this illustration? Just this. You will do whatever is necessary in order to get rid of cancer. You will go through whatever treatment is required to eradicate the cancer.

Similarly, our greatest spiritual problem is our sin. Sin is the

great cancer of our souls. It is a barrier between God and us. Left untreated, we will be cut off from God for all eternity when we die.

The good news for our sin, though, is that there is a remedy! Jesus paid the penalty for sin. He bore the punishment for sin, and the remedy is applied to me when I believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But, if Christ has not been raised, I am still in my sins. That is, I still have unforgiven sins.

E. Unsaved Souls (15:18)

The fifth consequence of no resurrection is unsaved souls.

Paul said in verse 18: **“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”**

The phrase **“fallen asleep”** is one of the verses used by those who advocate “soul sleep.” However, that is not what Paul is teaching here. He is simply referring to death. The Bible frequently refers to death as “sleep.” Even Jesus did that in reference to the death of Lazarus, when he said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (John 11:11).

In verse 18 Paul was specifically referring to believers who had died prior to Christ. If there were no resurrection, the hall of the faithful in Hebrews 11 would instead be the hall of the foolish unsaved souls. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, and all the others would have had faith for nothing. They would have suffered mocking and flogging, chains and imprisonment, stoning and destitution, affliction and mistreatment, even death—all for nothing.

Obviously, the same consequence would apply to every believer who has died since Paul wrote this statement. Paul himself, the other apostles, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Carey, Spurgeon, Elliot, Lloyd-Jones, Stott, Heil, Cali, and every other believer would have died for nothing. They would have an unfounded faith, unforgiven sins, and be unsaved souls.

But thanks be to God, for Jesus himself said in John 14:19b, “Because I live, you also will live”!

F. Unhappy People (15:19)

The sixth consequence of no resurrection is unhappy people.

Paul said in verse 19: **“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”**

Paul had been preaching that Christ’s resurrection brought salvation and blessings to all who received it. Christianity gave one a Savior, forgiveness, the gospel, saving faith, eternal life, abundant life, and hope for the future.

To **have hope in this life only** in the resurrection of Christ would be to teach, preach, suffer, sacrifice, and work entirely for nothing. If Christ is still dead, then he not only cannot help us in the life to come but he cannot help us now. If he cannot guarantee us eternal life, he cannot improve our earthly life. If he is not alive, where would be the source of our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control *now*? Frankly, the Christian life would be a mockery, a charade, and a tragic joke.

If Christ was still dead, rightly does the apostle say that **we are of all people most to be pitied.**

So, the six significant consequences of no resurrection are as follows: unproductive preaching, unfounded faith, untrue witness, unforgiven sins, unsaved souls, and unhappy people. These are devastating consequences—if there is no resurrection.

Conclusion

Thankfully, Christians do have a hope of a resurrection!

The Bible, and Paul particularly, teach that death is the final outcome of living in a fallen world. It is not a punishment for believers, but it is used by God to complete our sanctification (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

At the moment of our death there is a separation between our bodies and our souls. The souls of believers go immediately into God's presence (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:8). And the souls of unbelievers go immediately to eternal punishment (cf. Luke 16:24-26). The bodies of both believers and unbelievers, however, remain on the earth and are subject to decay.

Finally, when Christ returns to earth at the end of history, he will raise up the bodies of all believers of all time and reunite them with their souls. The bodies that believers will then have will be like the body of Jesus after his own resurrection from the dead. That is, they will be glorified bodies for all the rest of eternity (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-58).

The hope that Christians have is that one day we will have resurrected, glorified bodies. We are absolutely assured that will happen because Jesus was resurrected with a glorified body just three days after he died. And the body he got is the same body that we who believe in Jesus will get too.

So, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is vital for the gospel. If there is no resurrection, all kinds of disastrous consequences follow. But, Christ is alive! He has a resurrected, glorified body, and we are assured that we will have one too! Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank you that his resurrection guarantees our own resurrection. Thank you that his resurrection guarantees the gospel. And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve the risen Jesus Christ!