

A Christian musician named Nicole Nordeman wrote a song called *What If*. The song is written as if she is having a conversation with a friend about whether the resurrection is true or false. Her friend is skeptical, so Nicole is laying out the consequences on both sides. The consequences if the resurrection is false, and the consequences if the resurrection is true.

Here are some lines from the song.

What if you're right? What if [Jesus] takes his place in history With all the prophets and the kings

Who taught us love and came in peace But then the story ends.

What then?

Let me pause there. If you listen to the song, you get the sense of doom and hollowness. That would be truly horrifying if the skeptic is right and Jesus did not rise. Now back to the lyrics of the Christian responding to the skeptic...

But what if you're wrong?

What if there's more?

What if there's hope you never dreamed of hoping for?

What if the arms that catch you, catch you by surprise?

What if He's more than enough?

What if it's love?

How do we know that Christianity is true? We know it is true because of the publicly verified historical facts. Why does it matter? It matters because if it were not true, a lot would be different for us. **The fact of the resurrection of Christ, guarantees our resurrection.**

First, Paul takes verses 12-19 to show that Christianity is public, and what it would be like if today's news showed that the body of Jesus had been found, and there had not been a resurrection. Second, Paul takes verses 20-28 to show what it means for us that Jesus DID in fact rise again. Third, Paul shows in verses 29-34 how it impacts our Christian life what we believe or deny about the resurrection.

What is interesting is to notice to whom Paul is writing – believers who have adopted some of the beliefs of the world. The apostles were consistent in living for the Kingdom of God. The unbelievers are consistent – they just live for this world. The believers in Corinth were trying to have it both ways. Paul was writing to them.

### 1. The aftereffect *IF* Christ *HAD NOT* risen. (v.12-19)

The bottom line here is that if Christ had not risen, we have placed our trust

in a dead man, who cannot save us because He remains dead.

Theoretically, Christianity could be falsified. What we mean is if the body of Jesus was found on earth, it would show the claims of Christianity to be false. Now we don't need to be nervous about this for two reasons. 1) no one will ever uncover the dead body of Jesus on this earth somewhere, because Jesus has His own body with Him in heaven here He is, and His body has been glorified, and He lives forever in that body. 2) The second reason we don't have to be nervous about the falsification of Christianity is the fact that if the body of Jesus were discovered, we would want to know about it. Why? Because of this one simple truth - that if Jesus did not rise again from the dead, then Christianity cannot be true. If Christianity is not true, we should all abandon it immediately.

Are you starting to get the sense that the resurrection is a watershed issue?

If we deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, we deny Christianity.

Here is the key thing for us – Jesus is not just the crucified Savior, he is also THE RISEN LORD. We don't gather each Sunday to worship a dead person. We gather to worship a living person. So, for us to talk about what if Jesus did not rise again, is very awkward and difficult, and yet Paul found it necessary to do so, because of the false teaching circulating in the church.

We find this in verse 12, for some believers in the church in Corinth to say that “*there is no resurrection of the dead*” is as dangerous and as foolish as to take a woodsaw, climb a high tree, and then saw off the branch on which you are sitting. If we could freeze frame the tree-trimmer like some commercials freeze frame actions, and then Paul could appear in mid-air to talk with the tree trimmer, Paul would say – have a look - you are sitting on that branch, and let me help you to see the importance of that fact - that after you cut off the branch, you yourself will fall to the ground, together with the branch. You do realize that, right? When we hear supposedly Christian people pontificate that people don't rise from the dead and miracles don't happen, we find the same sort of lack of thought about what that means for their whole outlook.

Paul worked to show them that their beliefs won't work when in verse 12, Paul wrote “*how can some of you say...*” It is Paul's expression of astonishment. It is connected back to verse 1, where Paul was reminding them of the gospel, helping them to recall to their minds, as though the basic knowledge of the facts had escaped them. Paul found it necessary to begin again and teach the believers in Corinth an elementary fact, which they had already previously accepted.

We see how if the believers were going to toy with this concept, then Paul would have to address it. Here goes.

In verse 13, Paul addressed it by pointing out the most obvious of consequences, that it almost seems like the believers in Corinth had not realized. There are natural consequences that include conclusions that the Corinthians were

not willing to grant. So, brothers and sisters, if you are going to deny that any miraculous events ever happen, then you will have to deny the most important event in all of Christianity. Here is how Paul wrote it in verse 13, “*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*” You do realize that, right?

In verse 14, what would that do to preaching? It would make preaching hollow. What would it do to your faith? It would make your faith empty, for you would be trusting in a dead man. So central to Christianity is the truth claim and the historical event of the resurrection of Christ, that if this linchpin were removed, a cacophony of other dependent logical derivatives also collapse.

In other words, you cannot become a postmodern with regard to the resurrection, and still be a true Christian.

In verse 15, Paul showed that the situation would be even worse. The preachers would be misrepresenting God, and therefore preachers would be liars. If God had not raised Christ from the dead, and Paul preached that God did raise Christ from the dead, then the most charitable way to state it is that Paul misrepresented God.

In verse 16, Paul repeated verse 13 to intensify the chain of repercussions.

In verse 17, Paul repeated the point about faith being empty, but then added the next level of consequence - that you would still be in your sins. In other words, the death of Christ by itself alone, without the resurrection of Christ, would have no atoning, redemptive, or liberating effect for our human guilt before God. Friends, this is in the Bible. It is correct to say this.

In verse 18, another consequence would be that those Christians who have died were expecting to awaken to a new dawn and a new day, but instead they would have utterly perished and would never awaken at all.

In verse 19, the summary statement for all believers is if we only have this earthly life, we are more to be pitied than all other human beings. Why? Because of all the points Paul just made – the gospel would have no substance, our faith would be ineffective, the witnesses would be liars, our sin would retain its destructive and damaging control, and our fellow believers who have died would be irretrievably lost. The story ends. What then? Cue the depressing music of eternal hollowness and emptiness. Again, let me be clear, all of that is only IF Christ had NOT risen again. Which brings us to our second point. Let’s unpack what happens instead, SINCE Christ HAS RISEN, INDEED!

## **2. The aftereffect that Christ did rise. (v.20-28)**

The bottom line here is that since Christ did rise, we have placed our trust in a living Savior who has saved us because He rose again and lives.

In verse 20, when Paul wrote “firstfruits” it means two things. a) that Christ is the best, and b) that Christ represents us with a promise that we will rise from the dead also.

In verses 21-22 , Paul wrote about the beginning of death and the end of death. To do this, Paul contrasted Christ with Adam. Through the first human being Adam, death entered world history for the first time. Adam sinned and introduced death. But Christ came to abolish death. How? Only by His resurrection from the dead. It was the only way to end death. Because Jesus was raised, so all believers will be raised on the last day of world history.

There are scholars who call verses 21-22 the high point of the whole letter, because our being trapped in sin ever since Adam sinned, guarantees our being released from sin ever since Christ rose again from the dead. Our unity with Adam leads to our death, and our unity with Christ leads to our resurrection.

This is radically new action of God with retroactive consequences all the way back to Adam, and all the way forward to every future believer. The resurrection of Christ announces the dawn of the general resurrection to come.

It was the failure to grasp this central place of Christ’s resurrection for all of world history, that was the heart of the problem in the church in Corinth. This is the basis of Paul’s argument. Notice this – that verse 21 does NOT say by a man came death, and by a man came life. No. Instead, verse 21 says, “*by a man came death, [and] by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*” This is the end of one world, and the start of another. This is the end of the world signified by Adam, and the start of another world, signified by Christ.

In verses 23, Paul gave the sequence of events that bring an end to death. First Christ rises, then later all who belong to Christ. For his purpose in these verses, Paul is right now ignoring the future for those who do not belong Christ. We know that they will be condemned. This is not teaching salvation for everyone. Only for believers. Verses 24-25 show the end when Christ delivers the Kingdom of God over to His Father, after destroying every enemy.

Verse 26, in the sequence of Christ’s activities, the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself. Verse 27 shows God the Father’s participation with Christ – that it is the Father who puts all things under the feet of Christ or under the rule and authority of Christ. That is, everything except God the Father Himself, of course.

Verse 28, Christ the Son Himself will even be subjected to the authority of God the Father. God the Father is all in all. What this means is that God the Father is King over all, and everything is placed where God the Father places everything. Death is put under subjection to Christ, who is the Resurrection and the life. Every believer who ever dies, will be raised again to life by the authority of Jesus, who got that authority from God the Father. God the Father is the supreme ruler over all

things.

What if you doubt some of this? That brings us to our third point.

### **3. The aftereffect of denying the resurrection. (v.29-34)**

In these verses Paul showed the obvious inconsistencies in the teaching and practices of Christians who claimed that there is no resurrection from the dead, but want to live with some of the other parts of Christianity.

In verse 29, for example, Paul addressed a practice in the church in Corinth. If someone had died without being baptized, they would baptize a still living person in place of the dead person, like a substitute. We don't have any more information about this practice, other than this verse. Don't get distracted, because Paul's only point is clearly made. The point is that the believers in Corinth were inconsistent. If they believed there is no resurrection, (so that dead people are dead, end of story) then what benefit is it to try to give a dead person any benefit from a baptism for them? Paul was simply pushing them to think through the aftereffects of their beliefs.

In verse 30, is Paul consistent? Does Paul think through the aftereffects of believing the resurrection? Yes, in verse 30, Paul asks why would Paul risk danger and persecution because of the gospel? Not because Christianity makes people live moral lives, but rather because the central claim is true – Jesus is alive.

In verse 31, Paul wrote that he dies every day. What he was referring to is the fact that Paul was putting himself in danger every time Paul entered a new city. Paul had to face potential death from angry Jews or from the authorities in each place. But Paul boasts with a holy pride in what Christ has done in the believers as a result of Paul's courage. The apostle was willing to lay down his life if it would cause the message to spread. Why? Because of the truth of the resurrection. So, yes, Paul was living consistently with what Paul believed.

In verse 32, Paul referred to the danger he faced in the city of Ephesus, where he was writing this letter. Over in Acts 19, we read that Paul narrowly escaped death from a riot in the city of Ephesus. Perhaps Paul was referring metaphorically to spiritual beasts who would try to put him to death. It seems more likely that, Paul was referring to both the spiritual beasts and also the actual wild beasts, because often they would take Christians and put them in the arena with such animals. Again, let's not get distracted. The question here was why Paul would subject himself to such dangers? What would be the gain for Paul? Because the resurrection is true, Paul could spread the message. But if the resurrection is not true, then Paul should not endanger himself, but rather should relax, eat, and drink, and enjoy himself, because this life is all that there is. While Paul was showing the inconsistency of the Corinthians, Paul was show the logical consistency of his own actions. Paul lived out what Paul believed. Listen to how Paul summarized in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, "*For we do not want you to be unaware,*

*brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.”*

In verses 33-34, Paul admonished the believers in Corinth not to be led astray by those in their church who would doubt the resurrection. Verse 33, “*Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’*” Those who deny the resurrection are bad company of people with whom to spend time, because they threaten to lead you astray. In verse 34, Paul mentions another group – those who have no knowledge of God. Think of today – there are pastors of churches who dispute the indisputable and dispense with the indispensable, by teaching that there is no resurrection. And some people are falling for it. Why does anyone attend those churches? Because they come under the intoxicating influence of false pastors, but they should have known better. Because there is so much at stake, Paul’s advice is clear and forceful to end this paragraph in verse 34, “*Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”*

This is how the Orthodox Presbyterian Church got founded in 1936, after years of open and public demonstration that many ministers in the old Presbyterian denomination denied the resurrection. Our founding fathers could not abide, and it would have been shameful to stay in that denomination. The only right thing to do was to openly declare that Jesus the head of the church is alive, and that we are following Him.

Pastor Martin Luther, influential for the Reformation, said, that if a person does not believe in the resurrection, “...he must deny in a lump the gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all of this is linked together like a chain...Whoever denies this...must simultaneously deny far more...in brief, [he must deny] that God is God.”

### **Conclusion:**

**Admit that we base everything on the resurrection.**

We do not live with the montra of eat and drink.

We live in an entertainment age. Self-indulgence. The problem of the rise of marijuana use is the desire for an altered consciousness. Why? Because they want to be pleasantly distracted from life’s problems. They don’t want to face things. If this life is all there is, then eat, drink, smoke, and escape into movies, shows and games.

That is not the Christian life for the person who knows for sure that Christ has risen and that therefore we will rise.

We have more to live for than the pursuit of personal pleasure.

The center of our lives is not self-gratification.

What is fascinating about Paul's statement in verse 33, is who impacts whom? Is it those with good morals who have a greater impact on those with bad morals? Or is it instead that those with bad morals have a greater impact on those with good morals?

Paul says don't be deceived. You are being influenced by the world to waste your life with seeking pleasure, unplugging, with endless entertainment, sports gaming, eating, drinking, smoking, and chasing frivolous things.

Hey, if Jesus did not rise, then enjoy yourself, because this world is all there is.

But since Jesus rose again, time is a wasting for us to testify.

Here is the key – don't act like there is no resurrection.

We get drunk on entertaining distractions. In verse 34, Paul says sober up. Everything we do in this life matters for eternity. Jesus is alive from the dead, and this changes everything for this life, and everything for eternity future.

Why do we chase distractions? Because of how we feel at that moment. We feel overwhelmed or drained or discouraged. But instead, we are to live our lives because of the truth of Christianity. That what Paul and the apostles said happened to Jesus has actually happened. We have no need to be overwhelmed by the storms of life or even by times of doubt. Our relationship with God was secured not by the strength of our faith, but by the power of the cross and the resurrection. Our standing with God and our place in this world is not dependent on our current emotional status, not based on our feelings. This is truly good news. We find our comfort, our consolation, our strength during the trials and burdens of life, in the living, dying, and rising again of Jesus Christ for us in in our place.

The fact of the resurrection provides structure for our lives and for our thinking about our lives. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, every moment of our lives has the Spirit's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness. We can die to self and live to Christ who is our wisdom and peace.

We can live looking ahead to that one glorious day coming soon when the sky will be rolled back like a curtain, and all the promises of God will be fulfilled in the resurrection of our bodies. This is our hope and confidence on stressful days. The resurrection is the reason we go on living with thankfulness and obedience to our Gracious Savior.

Christianity is true whether people in our generation believe it or not. Don't let other people turn your religion into subjective religious experience for you. Don't let them say that their beliefs are for them and your beliefs are for you. Jesus rose, whether we or they believe it. It is externally guaranteed. They will face Him one day.

Our motto is not – eat drink and be merry. Our motto is not sex, drugs, and

rock and roll. Our motto is He is risen, he is risen indeed, and he is coming again soon.

Only a person who believes that Jesus is alive is on a mission to present this truth to a dying world.

How can we be different from the world? Rely on the resurrection to give you resurrection life. If this is not true, we are still in our sins, Christianity is patently false, and we have no hope.

But since this is true, we have every reason for hope, our sins are washed away, and our living Savior fills us with resurrection life.

**Admit that we base everything on the resurrection.**