

Still In Your Sins

I Corinthians 15:12-19

What is the relationship between Jesus' resurrection from the dead some 2,000 years ago, and the general resurrection of believers that is still to come?

They are both part of the same redemptive event.

It is as if they are joined by an unbreakable cable.

Jesus did not rise from the dead for his own benefit alone.

He rose from the dead for the benefit of all who would put their trust in him.

If this were not true, then you would still be in your sins, just as surely as if Jesus had not risen from the dead at all.

Listen to the words of John Calvin:

"Christ did not die, or rise again for himself, but for us: hence his resurrection is the foundation of ours, and what was accomplished in him, must be fulfilled in us also... Otherwise he would have risen again needlessly and to no purpose, because the fruit of it is to be sought, not in his own person, but in his members."

In I Corinthians 15, Paul is confronting the lie that there would be no future bodily resurrection of believers. He looks at the resurrection from many different angles. In our text today, he exposes the theological implications of denying our future resurrection.

In essence, he will argue that if the general resurrection of believers could somehow be abolished, then the entirety of the Christian religion would become unraveled. And believe me, you do not want that to happen.

Read I Corinthians 15:12-19.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead,
how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Paul, and the other apostles consistently proclaimed the Good News that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. The Corinthians had believed this message.

And because they believed, they were being saved. But because faith is not simply something we do once in our lives, but the principle by which we live out our entire lives, the faith of the Corinthians was being assaulted.

They were not purposely trying to destroy the Good News. But the enemy of Christ, Satan, is continually waging war in the minds of believers. And every day, Christians must engage in spiritual warfare to persevere in the faith.

We must daily fight to submit our thinking to the truth of the Gospel laid down for us on the pages of the Bible. I don't think most of us understand the intensity of the battle, or the tenacity of our foe, or the terrible consequences of altering the truth.

The Corinthians thought they could have Christ, and the Gospel, while denying the future resurrection of believers. Paul argues that they have been seduced into believing a lie that would destroy their salvation entirely.

It is important to note that throughout chapter 15 Paul is only dealing with the resurrection of believers. The Bible teaches that unbelievers will also experience a sort of resurrection of the body, but that resurrection will only lead to their eternal judgment of both body and soul in hell.

^{ESV} **Acts 24:15** having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

But the resurrection of believers is a resurrection to life. And it is this resurrection that some of the Corinthians were questioning.

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Why?

It could be that Paul is simply using logic: If there is no such thing as a resurrection of anyone, then that makes it impossible for Christ to have been raised from the dead.

If there are no Guatemalans with blue eyes, then it is impossible for Christian Ramazzini to have blue eyes. But the logical argument only goes so far. What if Christian was the one exception to the rule. Could it not be possible that while no other Guatemalan's have blue eyes, Christian actually does have blue eyes?

I think that is exactly what some of the Corinthians were arguing. They were not denying that Jesus had risen from the dead, bodily. They were affirming that Jesus had risen from the dead, bodily. But they were denying that Christians were going to rise from the dead, bodily. And they could not see how these two resurrections were inseparably joined.

Paul's argument goes further than proving a logical fallacy. He is making a theological argument: The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of all who put their hope in him are connected. They are theologically one event. You cannot do away with one, without doing away with the other. And if you have one, then you necessarily have the other.

Do you believe that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ the resurrection of all who are in Him is guaranteed?

Do you believe that if you deny your own future resurrection, assuming you continue in Jesus, that you are not only denying your future, but you are declaring that Jesus has not risen from the dead either?

Let me ask it in a slightly different way - a way that we are far more tempted to think: Do you believe that Jesus' victory over sin guarantees your own victory over sin? Do you believe that if you deny your own future victory over sin, that you are also declaring that Jesus did not win victory over sin?

Our victory over sin is joined together with Christ's victory over sin.

I know that your continued struggle with sin screams to you that this is not true.

Every one of us is tempted to separate our own victory over sin, from Jesus' victory over sin.

But if we deny the victory over sin of those who are "in Christ", we are also necessarily denying Christ's own victory over sin. They are inseparably joined.

"Christ did not die, or rise again for himself, but for us: hence his resurrection is the foundation of ours, and what was accomplished in him, must be fulfilled in us also... Otherwise he would have risen again needlessly and to no purpose, because the fruit of it is to be sought, not in his own person, but in his members." Calvin

This is why our victory over the world is not gained by our own strength and ability, but by believing in Jesus Christ. As we place our faith in him, his victory becomes ours.

1 John 5:4-5 ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

And Jesus' victory over sin is most clearly demonstrated in his being raised from the dead. Certainly, in his wilderness temptations, Jesus proved that Satan was no match for him. But it was in his obedience to the will of God in his death, that he overcame sin. And in his resurrection, the Father declared that his victory was complete, and that it was not only for himself, but for all who would place their faith in him.

We are not unlike the Corinthians. We want to acknowledge Christ's victory while denying our own. The Bible does not give us this option!

Our text for today ends at verse 19, but I want you to take a moment to look at verse 20. Because it is in verse 20 that we see Paul's theological reasoning:

1 Corinthians 15:20 ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

What does Paul mean by "firstfruits"?

A farmer would plant a field, say of corn. After the corn is full-grown, it would produce a harvest, one harvest. The entire field would produce one harvest of corn.

But, any good farmer would watch his crop very closely. And, very typically, the entire field would not get ripe on the same day. There would be some stalks that would ripen more quickly than the rest. The farmer would pick these immediately while waiting on the rest of the crop to ripen. These first ears of corn would be called the firstfruits.

The firstfruits were part of the whole harvest. They were not a separate harvest from the rest of the field. They were a part of one whole harvest.

There is one resurrection harvest.

Did you ever wonder why God does not give people their resurrected bodies immediately after they die? Maybe many reasons. But one reason is that everyone who belongs to Jesus is raised together as one harvest. Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, John... all of the saints throughout history. We are all raised together at the last day.

Jesus' resurrection was not some isolated event out there by itself. His resurrection was a firstfruit of the entire resurrection.

So Paul is making a theological point: If there is no harvest, then the firstfruits of the harvest does not exist either.

There is a union between what Christ has done, and what we will do.

Romans 6:3-12 ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free¹ from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.

The means of our sanctification is faith in Jesus. It is believing that his victory is not meant for him alone, but is itself the guarantee of our victory.

There is no question that believing this is difficult. We are so prone to build our faith on our current experience, rather than living by faith in the promises of God's Word.

We may struggle long and experience terrible torments of the soul before that victory becomes ours. And in some sense, it is never perfect in this life. But that does not matter. Our faith continues,

because we believe that Jesus' victory was complete. And therefore, our complete victory is assured. To deny our victory is to deny the victory of Christ.

I know that your own experience may argue against the truth of our union with Jesus Christ. Some will let go of Christ because they no longer believe that He will give them victory. But the Gospel is that all who continue to hold onto Christ, will have for themselves his victory.

Paul is going to explore the implications of denying the future bodily resurrection of all believers. Because of the union of Jesus Christ with all who hope in him, these are the implications of denying the bodily resurrection of believers.

And they are far more terrible than any of the Corinthians thought possible.

They thought they could deny their own resurrection while continuing to believe these other Gospel tenets. Paul says, "No, you most certainly cannot. If you deny your own resurrection, you must also deny these other gospel truths."

¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised,
then our preaching is in vain
and
your faith is in vain.

Denying your own resurrection, because of your union with Christ, is a denial of Christ's resurrection. And, if Christ has not been raised, then preaching, our preaching, is like an empty bucket. There is nothing inside of it.

The powerful victory of Christ over sin and death for the benefit of all who hope in him is the essence of preaching. If you take away that his victory is your victory, then you take away his victory. And preaching is left utterly empty.

Preaching that is not grounded in the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death is empty. As I stand here, if I cannot proclaim to you Jesus' victory as a victory that is joined to your victory, then I have nothing to preach to you. Period.

And what is more, you have nothing to believe in. If Jesus' victory is not also the guarantee of your victory, then Jesus has not won the victory. And your faith in him is vain. It is empty. It is worthless.

But how often do we want to do this very thing? We want to somehow believe in the victory of Christ while denying our own. Such a faith is an empty faith.

Jesus is indeed victorious over sin. And our faith in him must include the belief that his victory is ours, even before we actually experience that victory. That is what it means to live by faith.

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.

Paul is so adamant that he goes one step further: He says that the apostles would then be "false witnesses of God."

We are saying that God in Christ has won your victory and that this message is not one that we made up. We received it from God. At least, that is what we are claiming to be the case.

But if you are not raised from the dead, then we are actually false witnesses of God.

Paul may even be saying that God himself is a liar, because He is the one who gave to the apostles the gospel message.

Of course, the very thought of God being a liar is anathema, both to Paul and to the Corinthians. I am sure that they had no idea that their denial of the resurrection was implying that God was a liar.

But then, most of us do not really understand the implications of our false beliefs.

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.

Paul exposes the root of the lie: you are still in your sins.

If there is a lie that Satan wants you to believe it is that you can believe in Jesus and still be in your sins. That is precisely the trap that some of the Corinthians had fallen into.

What does it mean to be “in your sins.”

John 8:24 ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

To not be free from your sins.

In what way?

In two ways:

To not be free from the condemnation of sinners. To be in your sins is to still be under God's holy wrath. It is to be bound for an eternity of hell and separation from all that is good.

John 3:18 ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

In this life, you experience by faith the hope of the freedom from God's judgment. But one day, when Jesus returns, he will openly declare your pardon.

O what a happy day that will be! But not if the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then neither has Jesus been raised, and you are still in your sins – under the holy and eternal wrath of God. Death is not a happy day. It is the beginning of an unimaginable torment. And it is a never ending torment.

The thought of being still in your sins should truly make you shudder. Millions refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. It is terrible to consider, but they remain in their sins. But how terrible if we who have hoped in Christ are also “still in our sins”!

The second way in which we are still in our sins is that sin continues to have dominion over us. The ruler of this dark world is Satan. And the ruler of our dark hearts is our sin.

Through our union with Jesus in his death and resurrection, we are set free from the power of sin to dominate us. You can either be in Christ, or you can be in your sin. You cannot be both. I am not initially talking about your behavior. I am talking about a new reality that you can only receive by faith.

But as this reality takes hold of your conscious self, you begin to believe the truth that you can actually choose obedience to God rather than obedience to sin. You do not have this power in yourself. You have this power in Christ, in the resurrected Christ.

The Christian is commanded to put sin to death because he is no longer in his sins. The Christian, because he is now in Christ, is a slave of righteousness. Every day, the Christian draws hope from the reality that he is united with Christ in his resurrection. Final defeat is not an option for the one who is no longer “in his sins.”

Knowing this does not make the daily struggle against sin easier. But it does keep the Christian from utter despair.

The Christian will wake up each new day and strive for holiness, because he knows that he has been united to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Christian will continue to seek his heavenly Father in prayer, because prayer is the means by which heavenly graces are poured out in his heart.

The Christian will continue to read and study and meditate upon the Scriptures because only in them does he find the fullness of Jesus Christ, his Savior and Lord.

The Christian will continue to gather with God's people in worship and fellowship, because he needs to continually be reminded who he is in Christ.

The Christian will continue to repent of all known sin and continue to look to the Jesus for his cleansing and for renewal, because he knows that he is promised this renewal in Jesus Christ.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the guarantee of our own resurrection and final freedom from all sin...

But not if Jesus did not rise from the dead. So many people today deny Jesus' resurrection. And they think that by doing so, they have somehow gained freedom from God. Nothing could be further from the truth. By denying the resurrection of Jesus, they have sealed to themselves an eternity under the dominion of sin.

I cannot think of a worse fate than to still be in my sins. There is nothing worse.

Paul is not quite finished.

¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

To fall asleep in Christ is to die with the certain hope of being raised again.

But if Christ has not been raised then this hope is empty.

Your fellow believers who have gone before you are not enjoying fellowship with God and waiting for the resurrection of their bodies. They are perishing under the weight of their sin.

What a terrible thought.

¹⁹ If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The Christian faith brings comfort to many people. But if that comfort only lasts until the moment of our death, when we discover that it was all just a fantasy, we are of all people most to be pitied.

We are no different than the one who trusts in false gods. He may have hoped that his gods would save him, but that hope comes crashing down when the truth God comes riding on the clouds. But, if our hope as Christians is not a true hope, then we are the greatest of fools.

Jim Elliot, missionary to the Auca Indians, a tribe of Cannibals, who was brutally murdered along with several other missionaries by those very Indians, before he left the United States, was challenged that what he was doing was foolish.

He responded: He is no fool to give up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.

Jim's words have inspired many people to make many sacrifices for the sake of the gospel.

But, if there is no resurrection from the dead, Jim Elliot, and all who make sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel are the greatest of fools.

The Christian hope is only a good hope if it is a true hope.
We have good reason to believe that our hope is a true hope.

It is grounded in the reliable testimony of those men and women who saw the resurrected Christ.

But as a Christian, I have found it to be the case that I am more readily to doubt my own resurrection than I am to doubt the resurrection of Christ.

I am like the Corinthians. I have a tendency to proclaim his victory while denying my own. Over the years, it has been helpful to me to understand that I cannot deny the one without also denying the other.

I am convinced that Jesus has been raised. And in that resurrection he has conquered sin and death. And so, I am encouraged to keep on believing in my own victory over sin and death, in Christ.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are not IN your sins. You are IN Christ.

This is not a pass to keep on sinning and think that you can have your sin and Christ too. But it is the foundation from which you can continue to have hope as you fight against sin.

It is good to think about the day when you will be raised from the grave. It is good to think about having the same freedom from this dark world as your Lord and Savior is currently experiencing.

You see, you have a hope for this life. The Holy Spirit is living in you now, training you to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this sinful world.

But the portion of your hope that you receive in this life is only the tip of the iceberg. You have a deposit. But the full inheritance is still to come.

ESV Galatians 2:20 It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It is the doctrine of our union with Jesus Christ that gives us hope, true hope, a hope that is not empty.

ESV 1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:13-16 ¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action,¹ and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Christian, live this week believing in your union to Jesus' resurrection. You are no longer "in your sins". You are in Christ.

Amen!