



Over the last few weeks, we have been camped out in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul takes time to address his final concern for the Corinthians. This is the only (primarily) doctrinal issue that he has addressed in this letter, and it's a significant one. Some are saying there's no physical resurrection from the dead. But why is Paul so passionate about this? I only briefly mentioned Paul's practical desire for the Corinthians in bringing this up. After going through this entire chapter, Paul writes, in verse 58, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”**¹ The resurrection of Jesus impels zealous, abounding work for the Lord's glory in this present age! It's not simply a truth that encourages us that *someday* we will rise, but theology is to lead to godly living *now*, and the resurrection seems to be the most compelling truth to honor the Lord in yours and my lives.

The breadcrumbs leading to this verse are interspersed throughout even these verses, and so, I'm going to give you what I think the main idea of this text is: **Bodily resurrection leads to living a sacrificial, zealous life now (with our bodies)**. Before reading from our paragraph today, I want to quote Peter again, and what he says about the apostle Paul, before I expound on these verses: just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand. . .²

Now, listen to verse 29: Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?³ Are you kidding me?! What does this even mean? Because of this verse, Mormons baptize on behalf of the dead. And, in some ways, that makes sense. But I don't believe there's any records of other known denominations or larger Christian groups who have ever done this practice. Why? Well, this verse is *hard to understand*. There's actually no evidence of baptizing on behalf of the dead in the city of Corinth, and the early Greek church leaders didn't take the translation that we find in our modern English translations.

This is confusing; however, what's intriguing to me is that while there can be many phrases of Paul that are hard to completely understand, most often we can still get the point he's making. Maybe that's why Peter says that while he's hard to understand, the ignorant twist Paul. In essence, they think because it's confusing, they can come up with some obscure belief that doesn't fit God's gospel.

You know, you may be here today and thinking, “Oh boy, this is confusing. I'm checking out.” Or, you could think, “Oh, this is confusing. Maybe there's some radically new truth I can find here.” Neither of those viewpoints will help you today. Paul's emphasis in this chapter is on the reality of Jesus' physical resurrection and also the future physical resurrection of all those who trust in Jesus alone as their Savior and Master – with the result that it leads us to godly living. Therefore, the point of verse 29 must fit that

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:58.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Pe 3:15–16.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:29.

bigger purpose. Bodily resurrection leads to sacrificial, zealous living now. And here in these 6 verses, Paul confronts the hypocrisy if you're religious but don't embrace a bodily resurrection. And then he lovingly confronts the Corinthians to "wake up" or "snap out of" their trance to a false doctrine.

With this backdrop, let's jump into the text. We'll start with verses 29-30, where Paul states **if there is no resurrection:**

1. The physical, religious practice of baptism is hypocritical (v. 29).

Look at verse 29 again: Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?⁴

Honestly, I'm still hesitant on what this means exactly, but I will share with you two plausible views. The first view is just what it sounds. There are some people who are baptized on behalf of the dead. The "some people" probably refers to non-Christians, but religious people nonetheless (i.e. – those people who maybe led the Corinthians to play with the idea of a non-physical resurrection). If this is the interpretation, Paul is saying, "If the physical body doesn't matter, and if in the final resurrection God is going to release you from your physical body, **how can a physical baptism do any good for the soul of someone?**" Again, if you mark in your Bibles, the phrase "what do people mean" actually can be translated, "What will they achieve?" Paul is pinpointing the hypocrisy of these religious people. Does the body matter or does it not matter? If it doesn't matter in the afterlife, then baptism on behalf of dead souls can't achieve anything in the afterlife! This is one view, and we understand the point of hypocrisy. But this may not be the correct view.

The other view, which was taken by, I believe, all ancient Greek Christian leaders post-first century, was that this ought to be translated something like this: **Otherwise what do those hope to achieve who are baptized for their dying bodies?** Because Paul refers to our body being "dead" because of sin, many ancient Christians saw this as personal baptism. Why are we physically baptized if there's no future bodily resurrection? We know many things baptism speaks of: Jesus taking God's punishment for our sins in our place, our union with Jesus, and our acceptance into God's Kingdom of Light and life. It also speaks to the fact that just as Jesus died and rose from the dead, so it is with anyone who is a disciple of Jesus. Listen, if you have realized your sinfulness and brokenness and you realized you could never make yourself clean before God, and if you've turned to Jesus for forgiveness and a restored relationship with God, then you have died to sin and you live a new way of life. And, just as Jesus died physically and rose physically, baptism speaks to that future resurrection hope, too.

In this view, the idea Paul is making is if you don't believe in a physical resurrection in the future, why be physically baptized? It gives a bad picture. Baptism speaks to both the spiritual and physical realities. But, again, if the flesh doesn't matter, who cares about a physical religious rite like baptism? It's hypocritical. It makes no sense.

Whatever position you take, the point is clear. Bodily religious practices are hypocritical if the body doesn't matter in the future life. So, yes, Paul is hard to understand here, but he's also easy to understand. No future physical resurrection. Don't practice physical baptism. So, verse 29 deals with a religious practice. Now, moving into verses 30-32, Paul addresses not religious practices but our "religious" actions, our daily living to make much of the Lord. So, if there's no resurrection:

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:29.

2. A life of physical sacrifice is pointless (vv. 30-32).

Let's read verses 30-32 again: Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."⁵

If there's no resurrection, why live a life of sacrifice? In verse 30, I believe the "we" he's referring to are the other apostles. This is one of the great evidences of Jesus' resurrection. The disciples didn't give up on Jesus after his death, like many first century disciples of failed leaders. Instead, they became more passionate – so much so that, as far as we can tell from history, all of them died for Jesus. Maybe a few would die for someone, but every single one? But even if they didn't die, what about their lives of sacrifice? But even if all the others didn't sacrifice, Paul then pinpoints himself. In verse 31, he says he protests. The phrase "I die every day" could also be translated, "I court death every day." Remember 2 Corinthians 11:23-28? Speaking of his sufferings, he says, ". . .with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."⁶ But Paul doesn't only "die" in these things. Paul states that the reality of all Christians is one of dying daily. In 2 Corinthians 4, he says, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."⁷

This is Paul's consistent teaching to the churches: to share in Christ's sufferings and attain the resurrection. If you are a believer in Christ, your life is ordained to look like dying to yourself in the glorious anticipation of the resurrection.

Paul says, "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus." This probably refers to the intense human opposition he experienced, but his phraseology actually picks up on ancient Jewish legend that to give oneself willingly in the arena for God meant you believed in the future resurrection (see Garland, p. 721). From the small decisions of life to the larger decisions, Paul says he died. This reminds me of a quote I discovered recently by Charles Spurgeon: The best way to live above all fear of death is to die every morning before you leave your bedroom. The apostle said, "I die daily." When you have got into the habit of daily dying, it will come easy for you to die for the last time." Why? Because Jesus reveals that death, for the Christian, is the pathway to *life!* And, in living this way in this world, in our flesh, reveals to the world that while this life is important, it's not the life we live for.

So, what does Paul gain if he sacrifices in this life and there's no physical resurrection? Nothing! Now, you might say, "This sounds very self-serving of Paul. How selfish!" But the reality is that God is the greatest pleasure and if we are created body and soul and yet our bodies will miss out on ultimate

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:30–32.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 11:23–28.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 4:10–11.

blessing, then there's an aspect to our "selves" that God can satisfy. Therefore, we should be like the people who simply focus on their spirit and say we could do whatever we find most satisfying with our bodies!

Now, listen, Paul doesn't say that if you don't believe in physical resurrection, you might as well be the most horrible criminal in the world. He simply says do what pleases you! Make life about making the most for your body. This past week, I was listening to a guy who grew up in Christianity and has since rejected the Bible. He was talking about various viewpoints he may hold now. At one point he stated that there's no reason to have an ultimate purpose. Instead, we should just live for as many purposes as we want – whatever works for us. At another point, he gave an illustration of spilling something at someone's house, and at first you're concerned and you try to clean up, but when the host says, "no big deal," it gives you so much freedom. It even motivates you to still clean up without feeling shame. Then he said that's the same way with the universe. We mess up and the universe says, "No big deal" because the universe doesn't care. He said this was the gospel. This is good news.

But, here's my question: How can there be justice in this system? If the universe doesn't care, then shouldn't we all not care? While this person might say it doesn't all make sense, but it works for him, the logical end of this view leads to nihilism (there's hopelessness). Yet, he is doing what he wants to do. He's eating and drinking and doing whatever he wants because he believes his body is going to disappear. So, this physical body becomes the ultimate! And Paul states this is the logical conclusion. Now, by the way, when listening to this, I've thought, "Ok, I get what he's saying, but why do I strongly disagree with this?" In all transparency, I would believe like this guy if it isn't for the reality of Jesus' resurrection. The Spirit opened my eyes to the reality that Jesus rose from the dead. Then I simply cannot get past the evidence of it. I understand why people would say believing in a physical resurrection is foolish. It is foolish. . .if it were not true.

So, let me ask you, "Do you believe in a future bodily resurrection?" I know you probably will say yes, but let me challenge this. **Does your life consist of more emphasis on this life than the Kingdom of Jesus?** You can't serve God and money. You can't serve God and anything else? If you really believe a future resurrection, why are other things in this life controlling your attention. There's a dying world that needs the Kingdom of Christ to shine through us! **Do you emphasize the spiritual over the physical?** I've done this so many times, but God doesn't do that. To be spiritual does not mean to have positive, godly feelings. To be spiritual means to be dependent on the Spirit and living in such a way that exhibits his fruit. Read Galatians 5 and the beginning of verse 6. When we break up the physical from the spiritual, we de-emphasize living all life, with our entire beings, for God's glory. Everything a Christian does ought to be *spiritual*. We're set free to live this way, with our eyes set on Jesus and the Spirit. **Do you care about the souls of people around you?** If there is a physical resurrection from the dead (which there is), do you realize your neighbor, co-worker, family member who doesn't know Christ will miss the glories of the future resurrection. They will be judged justly by God to be away from his presence for all eternity for their sins. But that doesn't have to be the case. God is persistently revealing his kindnesses to them everyday to lead them to repentance. Now, he's given them *you* to speak the gospel. If you believe in a future resurrection, why not talk to them with joy, prayer and anticipation? And, if you're listening today, I pray you would talk to someone about what it means to trust Jesus. These are just a few implications if we believe that a resurrection is to come. But this actually leads us right into Paul's general, concluding statements.

Since the resurrection is true:

Do not be deceived by those who don't embrace the gospel (vv. 33, 34b). Look at verses 33 and then the end of verse 34: ³³Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." ³⁴ . . . For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.⁸ When Paul says "some have no knowledge of God," he doesn't mean that people can't have an awareness of God's existence. Instead, he's using the idea of knowledge that refers to *personally knowing God* – being reconciled to him and having a relationship with him. The Corinthians believed on Jesus and his gospel and therefore, they have a relationship with God. The same is true for anyone here who trusts the Lord. God is your God and your Father. The Holy, Holy, Holy One has set his love on you! But there are those who do not know this God. Why does Paul talk about them? Because at the beginning of verse 33, he says to not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. The context here is referencing how the Corinthians probably believed these other religious people's perspectives even though they're not Christians.

Do they realize the danger of this? As a somewhat side note, Paul isn't saying you can never listen to non-Christians. Paul even quotes from Greek poets and philosophers! The doctrine of God's common grace to this world means that all humans can see and speak the truth. But the point Paul is making here, according to the context, is that we are not to entertain and embrace truths that directly contradict God's gospel. Remember that while people who do not trust Christ can speak truth (and we can gain insight from them), they also do not embrace the gospel, nor will they promote it. So, whether you're listening to a non-Christian politician or a non-Christian sociologist or a non-Christian University Professor, remember this dual reality. We can praise the Lord for the truth they do see and communicate, but we don't embrace if they deny Core Beliefs of the faith. Bad company ruins good morals. In other words, teaching that denies the gospel will lead to a breakdown in behavior. Like Paul says elsewhere, false teaching spreads like gangrene.

So, what's the application here? Do not be deceived! To not be deceived emphasizes you more than others. I think in our day we're much more focused on all the other people and their problems. We're afraid of this issue or that issue. But why are we afraid? The Lord is our God and Jesus rose from the dead! Instead of focusing our attention on others of whom we're afraid, why aren't we focused on our relationship with the Lord and growing in obedience to him – revealing his resurrection life to those around us? To not be deceived means we're saturated in God and his Word – growing in communion with him and depending on the Spirit. Therefore, Paul's second application is to

Wake up (v. 34a). The beginning of verse 34 says, "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning."⁹ I have friends who were alcoholics – drinking a bottle of vodka a day. These friends have experienced the pain that alcoholism brings and they confess that it leads them to live a fake life. Their brain is affected so that they don't really understand reality. Some can be so drunk they wake up the next morning and not even remember what happened previously. I'm sure there are several here who have experienced that. If you are Christ's, you also confess that was the worst way to live. Jesus is so much better.

We probably understand this illustration of Paul. The bad theology of no physical resurrection is a drunken stupor. It's not *reality*. Paul is calling the Corinthians to wake up out of this drunken state. Jesus physically rose from the dead – for real! Therefore, we ought to stop living in the laziness of the false belief.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:33–34.

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:34.

To apply to us, if you and I genuinely understand what Christ has done for us at the cross and also what God gives to us through his resurrection, we will abhor sin more. **Bodily resurrection leads to living a sacrificial, zealous life now (in our bodies). We'll get out of the la-la land of a drunken stupor and live for the honor of God – dying to ourselves daily because the resurrection is true! Jesus is worthy!**

But maybe you say, “Why does a physical resurrection lead us to sacrificial, zealous living today?” If you’re asking this question, maybe it’s because you do not understand that the all-satisfying, all-powerful God is drawing you to himself for all eternity, where in his presence is fullness of joy. Maybe you don’t realize that full love and acceptance are awaiting those who trust Jesus, for all eternity. When you know this love and grace, you anticipate the reality of seeing your Savior face-to-face. I hope this is what will be the case for you. Let’s pray.

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