

## ***THE IMPLICATIONS OF A BODILY RESURRECTION***

### **1 Corinthians 15:29-34**

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Many of you know that I am a history nut, particularly as it relates to the history of our nation around the times of our battle for independence, which we celebrate in a few days, and of the Civil War. I am fascinated by the events and personalities that shaped and molded our nation during these turbulent times. I suppose more has been written on these two periods of American history than any other period. The one person who has had more written about him and upon whom much speculation still exists today is Abraham Lincoln.

The question is often asked of Lincoln, “Do you believe he was a Christian?” Many would say that Lincoln was a Christian based upon His frequent statements on the providence of God and the existence of a Creator. However, we must remember that Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, which sparked the age of evolution, was published the year prior to Lincoln’s election to office in 1860 and the theory of evolution was not the center of controversy that it would soon become and remains to be at present. Most people in Lincoln’s time would have assented to the truth of a Creator, believer and unbeliever alike. We also know that most presidents and politicians affirmed the providence of God while holding to errant views of Christianity, especially the early fathers such as Washington, Franklin and Jefferson who were steeped in deism. While not a deist like these, Lincoln’s statements on the existence and providence of God are not enough for me to label him a Christian.

However, there is one area of Lincoln’s religious thought that does not receive as much ink as the aforementioned thoughts, and that was his denial of the afterlife. Lincoln did not believe that an eternal state existed, whether spiritually or bodily. Lincoln believed that when one dies, he dies. That’s it. With this understanding, it is difficult to see how Lincoln could have been a believer when he saw no need for a Savior from the impending judgment of God. Was Lincoln a moral man? Yes, at least when compared to others. But there will be many a moral person that will spend eternity under the wrath of God.

Lincoln evidently had either never read or chose to deny our text this morning. Here, Paul begins to drive home the reality of the future bodily resurrection of the saints. He has grounded his argument on this matter in the undeniable fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ in vv. 1-28. He now expands on the bodily resurrection of the saint by considering some practical and moral implications that this future resurrection has for these at Corinth. Unlike Abraham Lincoln, Paul asserts that *the believer should live life on this earth with the ever-present reality of a physical, bodily life after death.*

### **I. Practical Implications (15:29-32)**

Paul drives the Corinthians to consider the implications of the bodily resurrection of the saint by using his favorite teaching method, that of asking questions. In asking these questions, Paul forces them to examine both a current practice in their own midst and some present realities in the life of others as well.

#### **1. Baptism for the dead (v. 29)**

The first question Paul asks concerned the practice of at least some at Corinth of baptism for the dead. “**What will those do who are baptized for the dead?**” Paul’s meaning here is rather obscure. There are many suggestions by scholars, Spurgeon said upwards of thirty in his day, as

to why the Corinthians were conducting these baptisms for the dead. As one writer put it, “the ingenuity of the exegetes has run riot” [Conzelmann, quoted by Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 215]. I believe the proper understanding is that of a vicarious baptism by some at Corinth for those who had professed faith in Christ but who died before they were baptized. We have seen how important baptism was to these at Corinth, even to the point of abusing it as an ordinance. That seems to be the case here. As Tom Schreiner notes, “Baptism was considered so important by the Corinthians that they went ahead and conducted a baptism on the behalf of the person who died” [*Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 376].

In bringing this question to their attention, Paul was not condoning the practice of vicarious baptism. He does not identify himself with the practice. Notice he asks, “**What will those do?**” not, “What will *we* do?” He is simply using their practice of baptism for the dead as an argument to support the reality of the bodily resurrection of the saint. The question then becomes, “*What is the meaning?*” or “*What is the value?*” or “*What is the purpose?*” of their practice if there is no resurrection from the dead? On the one hand, they were denying the resurrection. On the other hand, they were practicing something that was senseless apart from it. So Paul asks the question, “**If the dead are not raised, why then are they baptized for them?**” Paul’s point is that “**if the dead are not raised,**” then it was a monumental absurdity to baptize the living for the dead. Their own practice contradicted their belief.

## 2. Persecution of the saints (vv. 30-31)

Paul then appealed to the sacrifices that he and the other apostles and saints (**we**) made for the sake of the gospel, of which the resurrection was a part. If there was no resurrection, then he asks for some explanation from these at Corinth as to “**Why are we also in danger every hour?**” These men who first were called by God to carry the gospel to the four corners of the earth, who laid the foundation for us to carry the message of salvation to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, did so at great risk to their lives. We read of their persecutions in the book of Acts. They were imprisoned (Acts 4:3, 5; 5:18; 8:3; 12:3-4; 16:23-24, 37; 21:33; 22:19), beaten (Acts 5:40; 16:22-23, 37; 18:17; 21:32; 22:19), stoned (Acts 7:58-59; 14:19), and, in some cases, murdered (Acts 7:60; 12:1-2; 22:20).

We read of Paul’s specific persecutions in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

**2 Corinthians 11:23-28** – <sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. <sup>26</sup> *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.

And why did Paul endure such persecutions?

**2 Corinthians 4:7-11** – <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the

dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul expresses this thought directly in our text in v. 31, **"I die daily,"** and he pointedly tells the Corinthians that this fact was as sure as his belief that they were truly converted, **"I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."**

### 3. The vanity of "no resurrection" (v. 32)

In v. 32, Paul relates a further personal experience from his time in Ephesus. There is much debate as to whether Paul's fighting with wild beasts is to be taken literally or figuratively. The account of his stay in Ephesus does not reflect that Paul actually fought with wild beasts, nor do any of Paul's lists of personal persecutions. Based on this, it seems likely that this incident is to be taken figuratively. It could be that Paul is using this to illustrate the danger he faced at Ephesus during the riot instigated by Demetrius and his cohorts recorded in Acts 19:23-41, where we read that these people acted like wild beasts. Paul again relates this incident in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; <sup>9</sup> indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.

This incident, along with all of Paul's sufferings, would profit him nothing if there were no resurrection from the dead. His very hope was grounded in the truth that God would deliver him from death, not just on this earth, but fully and finally in his resurrection. Hence his conclusion, **"If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE."** Here he quotes Isaiah 22:13 where the prophet rebuked his listeners for not taking the warnings of divine judgment seriously. Jesus also alluded to this proverb in Luke 12:19-20 in the parable of the rich fool where the fool says to himself, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'" And what was God's response to him? <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'"

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then all of these persecutions were pointless. As one writer put it, "If the apostles' faith in this fundamental truth of the gospel were misplaced, then they were risking their lives for a dream without substance. They had lost hold of reality to embrace a mirage" [Geoffrey B. Wilson, *1 Corinthians*, 226].

As Paul had already stated in v. 19, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men the most to be pitied." Abraham Lincoln had no hope because he did not believe in the afterlife. His belief in God was for this earth only. He faced great despair and times of deep depression at the loss of his loved ones, particularly his parents and a son, because he lived by the motto, **"LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE."** Do you live your life as if death is the final moment? Or do you live as if there will be eternal life, both physically and spiritually? Your belief in the afterlife will determine how you live your life on this earth.

## II. Moral Implications (15:33-34)

Having established the absurdity of denying a future bodily resurrection of the saints biblically, theologically, and practically, Paul now turns to the moral implications of a bodily resurrection.

### 1. What to overcome (v. 33)

The first moral implication that Paul gives drawn from the truth of the resurrection is stated in the negative, **“Do not be deceived.”** Deception is the greatest tool that Satan uses to lead the believer astray. This has been his hallmark since that day in the Garden where he deceived our first parents by distorting God’s Word and casting a shadow of doubt on God’s love for them. The snare of deception is strong because we are often well into the midst of deception before we realize it. Deception is fatal because it appears to us as reality. We can be easily deceived even in those things that we know cannot be true because deception thrives on our sin nature. Deception feeds our selfish desire for something to be other than it really is.

Paul then reminds the Corinthians of a well-known quip from the pen of the poet Menander, **“Bad company corrupts good morals.”** My mother stated this way, “If you play with dirt while you are clean, you should expect to get dirty.” As parents, particularly if you have reared teenagers, it seems that we are constantly on our children to carefully choose their friends wisely. And that is good parenting. But what about us? Do we take care not only in the friends we choose, but in the things we watch and the things we listen to? The word that Paul uses in the Greek, *homilai*, here translated **“company”** can also mean “speech.” It has to do with the people and their words that can easily influence us, positively or negatively. Others, who Paul describes as **“bad company,”** had influenced the Corinthians in their belief concerning the resurrection. Paul wanted them to break off these associations and live according to the truth. They had been deceived in their doctrine concerning the resurrection of the believer and their doctrine of “no resurrection” had a negative influence on those who had **“no knowledge of God.”** In other words, what the Corinthians promoted as truth was damaging the character and name of God. Those who had no real knowledge of God would see no purpose in believing in God or Christ if there is no resurrection. This was the crux of the matter for Paul.

We must guard against this type of mistake in our own lives. It is easy to become so short-sighted in our beliefs that we fail to examine our doctrine according to the truth of God’s Word. The Corinthians had fallen into a trap that many today continue to be ensnared by, that of allowing culture or tradition to guide their beliefs. Many today simply believe what the majority believes, and this can be dangerous, even in the church. We must constantly examine our beliefs to see if they measure up to the only source of truth, the only definer of good, God and His Word. We too should remember the quip, **“Bad company corrupts good morals.”**

### 2. What to become (v. 34a)

The second moral implication that Paul gives that will be evident in one who believes in the resurrection of the saint is stated in the positive, **“Become sober minded, as you ought.”** The KJV is more forceful here, “Awaken to righteousness.” The deception of the Corinthians had lulled them into a stupor concerning the truth. Paul tells them to “wake up” to the truth and the resultant righteousness that should show in one who is seeking to live according to the truth. Notice the different translations:

*NASU* – **“Become sober minded, as you ought.”**

*KJV* – “Awaken to righteousness.”

*NIV* – “Come back to your senses as you ought.”

*RSV* – “Come to your right mind.”

All of these carry the thought of what Paul is trying to drive home to the Corinthians. The meaning of the Greek verb translated “**become sober minded**” in the NASU suggests that the people in Corinth were unable to think clearly about matters pertaining to life and death [Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 563]. They were in a fog concerning the resurrection. In this instance, Paul implores them to arise from their stupor and live life on this earth in the reality of being raised from the dead and living for all eternity with God and Christ. This is what they “**ought**” to do. This to would be beneficial to those who “**have no knowledge of God.**”

### **3. A sincere directive (v. 34b)**

The third moral implication of the resurrection that Paul gives is a summation of the first two and very direct, “**Stop sinning.**” Paul was willing to call sin sin. We live in a church culture today that tells us we should not be so forthright in our pronouncements of sin. To call attention to a person’s sin, especially in calling it sin, is considered offensive by many church leaders. Many would say that we are being judgmental and that we should be kind and compassionate in pointing out their “faults.” Some say that the using the word “fault” is even too strong. I once had a person tell me that we should refer to sin as “a mistake” or “an error.” My response to this person was that we make a mistake on a test or an error in baseball, but this is not a sin, which is a transgression of the holy law of God and a falling short of His glory.

Paul would not have been popular in this culture, nor was he popular in his day. Hence the reason for his persecution. Paul certainly understood that his message was unpopular to those who are not concerned about spiritual things. But the unpopularity of the message is the very reason for the message. People are sinners. Paul did not hesitate to call sin sin. The Corinthians were more comfortable in their intellect and independent thought than they were with revealed truth. This is sin and is dangerous in the Christian life. Over time, this type of thought severely weakens the Christian and often can lead to a total abandonment of God. As one writer suggests, “This is the worst type of sinning, for it affects not only our conduct but corrupts the very heart, the source of all conduct” [Lenski, quoted by Wilson, *1 Corinthians*, 228].

Paul spoke these things to their “**shame**” because they had the truth but they chose not to believe it and consequently not to live by it. Their denial of the resurrection of the saint affected not only them but those around them as well. This is the affect of sin. Even when our sins are private and not public, others are affected. But especially when our sin has been pointed out to us and we continue to live as if there is no real consequence. This is shameful because it dishonors the character and name God. It shows our belief that we know more than God does and that we are on the throne. That is the sinfulness of sin.

## **Conclusion**

**1) Our doctrine drives our practice. Our being drives our doing.**

**2) Are you willing to die for the sake of the gospel?** Many claim that they are willing to die for the sake of the gospel who do not demonstrate by their lives that they are willing to live for

the gospel. Dying for the gospel begins with living for the gospel, which is demonstrated by denying self, taking up your cross, and following Christ.

**3) If so, then you believe as Paul believed, “For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain.”**