

The Resurrection Of The Dead

Introduction. First Corinthians 15 is one long treatise on the subject of the resurrection of the dead. It is obvious that the Corinthians accepted Christ's resurrection but denied the resurrection of Christians. Current philosophical opinion in intellectual Greek circles as well as among the Jewish Sadducees was that such a reconstitution of bodily form was impossible once physical death had occurred. The appearance of resurrected Old Testament saints in bodily form to many observers in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus on the cross was apparently dismissed as hallucinations (Matthew 27:52). But throughout this chapter, the apostle shows that the bodily resurrection of Christians in the end of time is guaranteed by the bodily resurrection of Christ.

A great error of the past, which extends into our day, is the attempt to spiritualize the resurrection. There are some who believe that the resurrection taught in the New Testament has already passed. They teach that the resurrection took place in A.D. 70. They suggest that the resurrection is not literal, but spiritual. They say that the resurrection does not have anything to do with the human body; instead, it refers to a resurrection of the Christian system from the persecution inflicted by the Jews between A.D. 30 and 70. Said another way, it is simply the birth of the Christian faith out of Judaism. They believe that the physical body is discarded forever at death, and an individual receives a spiritual body in which he will dwell immediately and eternally in heaven. As we will see, this is completely against the apostle's teaching.

I. ***The Evidence Of The Resurrection (vss. 1-11)***

- A. The resurrection of Christ is a historic fact proven by the message of the gospel, the testimony of witnesses, and the conversion of Paul himself.
- B. Paul and the rest of the apostles always preached the resurrection as part of the gospel. The bodily resurrection is a part of the gospel whether it was preached by Paul or any other apostle.

II. ***The Importance Of The Resurrection (vss. 12-19)***

- A. Paul had preached the gospel to them, they had believed, and their lives had been transformed.
- B. But if the dead rise not, then Christ is dead and that gospel is a lie. Faith is only good if a person lives, if there is hope after death.

III. ***The Plan Of The Resurrection (vss. 20-28)***

- A. By affirming the union of the disciples with Christ, Paul showed that the resurrection is necessary. In His resurrection lies the guarantee that those in Christ will rise.
- B. Christ cannot hand over the kingdom over to the Father until every enemy is defeated. This reign began at Pentecost and will continue in His spiritual kingdom until every enemy is destroyed.

IV. ***The Incentives Of The Resurrection (vss. 29-34)***

- A. Paul mentions several occasions in which he had risked his life. He would not have done this for the cause of Christ if there were no hope after death.
- B. Paul warns them to avoid the false teachers who were trying to persuade them to believe that there was no resurrection of the dead.

V. ***The Bodies Of The Resurrection (vss. 35-49)***

- A. Paul uses several illustrations from nature, of which they would be very familiar, to show that there is no life apart from death.
- B. Every man who has a natural, physical body is earthly. When the resurrection of the dead occurs, we will be given a heavenly body like Jesus.

VI. ***The Victory Of The Resurrection (vss. 50-58)***

- A. There can be no sting in death when a person is a Christian, for Christ has removed that sting.
- B. Inscriptions on tombs in ancient Greece and Rome indicate that death was their greatest enemy; they saw no hope beyond the grave. In Christ, we have life and hope.

Conclusion. So if the hope of the bodily resurrection of believers is a delusion, then Christ could not have risen bodily from the grave. If He never rose from the grave, the gospel proclamation is a fraud; and there is no deliverance from sin and death (vs. 17). Therefore, the doctrine of bodily resurrection is not optional for us; it is the very essence of salvation.

But it is more than just a doctrine -- it is the basis of wonderful hope for the Christian (1 Peter 1:3-4). The hope of the resurrection and salvation is available only to those who respond with obedience to the Master's call.

The seriousness of denying the resurrection is seen in the case of two men in 2 Timothy 2:17-18. Believing that the resurrection was spiritual and occurred in A.D. 70, and that there is no bodily resurrection at the end of time will destroy a Christian's faith (1 Corinthians 15:19-21). It also runs contrary to the teaching of Jesus (John 5:28-30, 40). The teaching of the events surrounding the resurrection was intended to "comfort" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).