

## **"Now If Christ Is Preached ..."**

*"... that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12).*

This question of astonishment was asked by Paul after he had earlier reminded the Corinthians of the gospel he had preached when first he came to their city. He had shown that both Christ's death for our sins and his subsequent resurrection were subjects proclaimed by the prophets. Further, the resurrection of Christ had been verified by many witnesses who had seen Him over the course of 40 days He had spent on earth after His resurrection and before His ascension took Him back to the Father. Those witnesses included skeptics and "out and out" unbelievers who were so impressed by the compelling evidences of his resurrection, they became fervent proclaimers of it.

Having made mention of the apostles who walked with Jesus and of himself who was "*a child born out of due season*" he emphasized that there was complete harmony among them all: all witnessed the resurrected Christ and were ardent proclaimers of that truth. There is no record that any of the apostles other than Paul had, at the time of this letter, visited Corinth. Certainly Apollos had worked with them for a time (Acts 18:27-28) but, although he was an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, he was not an apostle. And while there was a segment of brethren who declared that "*I am of Cephas*" (1 Cor. 1:15); no account exists of Peter actually visiting there, although admittedly such was a possibility. No matter. The Corinthians were aware of the original 12 and of Paul's special call to apostleship and by Paul's emphatic words they all preached the resurrection. Here is the way he put it: "*whether then it be I or they, so we preached and so ye believed*" (1 Cor. 15:11).

These words "*and so ye believed,*" followed by Paul's question "*how say some among you there is no resurrection of the dead?*" show that some of these brethren had surrendered their former belief. The origin of this disruptive teaching in Corinth is not clear. In his second letter to Timothy Paul wrote of Hymananaes and Philetus "*men who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some*" (2 Tim. 2:12f). There is no specific identification of the place where these two men circulated their error although it was perhaps in Ephesus where Timothy was when Paul wrote his first and likely second letter to him (1 Tim. 1:3). Nor is there any evidence either for or against the notion they might have been the source of the doctrine in Corinth. Then again, the prevailing view of Grecian philosophers was to scoff at the idea of a

resurrection (Acts 17:32) and this might have been the cause for some Corinthians to deny what once they had espoused. But, whatever the source of the seed for this departure from faith, there were serious consequences, if such a view was true. These Paul spelled out in seven different, definite items.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, "*Neither hath Christ been raised*" — a denial of what had been preached to the Corinthians, which they had also received (1 Cor. 15:13). "*And if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain*" (1 Cor. 15:14). The word "*vain*" means "empty", "futile", "useless" and such would have been Paul's preaching to the Corinthians as well as the faith quickened in them by Paul's proclamation of Christ's resurrection.

Paul then adds, "*Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised*" (1 Cor. 15:15). Whether Paul meant by his statement "*false witnesses of God*" that the apostles were commissioned by God to preach a false claim or whether the apostles witnessed a different message than the message God gave them matters little: the apostles claimed that the message they preached that Christ had been raised on the third day was a message from God.

Repeating again that "*if Christ hath not been raised your faith is vain*" he adds, "*Ye are yet in your sins*" (1 Cor. 15:17). It is true that Christ "*died for our sins, according to the scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:1-4); but his failure to rise from the dead (if there is no resurrection from the dead) would show him to be but mortal, not God as he claimed to be. For if Christ died for our sins, he was "*raised for our justification*" (Rm. 4:25). Paul then turns to those who had already died saying "*then they that also are fallen asleep in Christ have perished*" (1 Cor. 15:18).

The summation of it all — if there is no resurrection from the dead — is this: "*If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable*" (1 Cor. 15:19). To endure the persecutions they suffered because they were Christians; to deny themselves carnal pleasures; to sacrifice for a cause that would carry them no higher than this earth made (make) Christians not only pitiable, but foolish and true objects of scorn and ridicule!

Jim McDonald