

# 1 Cor. 15.12-34: Resurrection (2)

## The **Problems** of *Denying* Resurrection [vv.12-34]

**v.12:** Since Paul has established that the resurrection of Christ was an integral part of the apostolic gospel which they had believed, how could “some” of them be saying “there is no resurrection of the dead?” Likely, this was a small number of individuals that were seeking to influence the believers at Corinth. As noted in the introduction, the church may have tolerated some false teachers from the Epicurean school that “had not the knowledge of God” (v.34) and denied the concept of resurrection altogether – including the resurrection of Christ. In addition, the believers were greatly influenced by their Greek philosophical background and found it difficult to comprehend the *bodily* resurrection of the saints. Yes, Christ had been raised from the dead, but was this one of a kind? A ‘not to be repeated’ event? Surely physical resurrection would not be the common experience of believers? There was widespread confusion!

In the verses that follow, Paul produces a devastating response to the gainsayers. **v.13:** With the words “but if”, Paul sets out to show how the premise of no resurrection, if taken to its logical conclusion, would lead to **seven** absurd and disturbing conclusions, not least “then is Christ not risen”! Even those denying only the *physical* resurrection of believers were logically denying the *physical* resurrection of Christ, for the resurrection of believers partakes of the same character and form as His (cf. v.20).

**1. Preaching is pointless! v.14:** If Christ is not risen, “preaching” is “vain”. The word “vain” [*kenos*] means *empty*, or *devoid of value* (useless). Any preaching would be merely empty babble with no valuable content.

**2. Faith is useless!** Faith exercised in Christ, as a result of hearing the preaching, would also be worthless if He was not risen from the dead. **v.15:** Indeed, the apostles would be exposed as deceivers, “false witnesses of God”, claiming to proclaim His message, but all the time misrepresenting Him and His word. If God had not raised Christ from the dead, then they were witnesses ‘against’ [*katá*] God, falsely accusing God of doing what He had not done and therefore undermining the honour and integrity of deity. **v.16:** So again, and for emphasis, if the dead are not raised [*present passive*] then “not even Christ has been raised” [NET].

**3. Salvation is lost! v.17:** Without the resurrection of Christ, faith in Him is “vain” [*mátaios*], fruitless, and salvation is impossible – “ye are yet in your sins”. If Christ is still in the grave, death (the consequence of sin) remains undefeated, and Christ cannot deliver men from the penalty and power of sin. Christ was “raised again for [*dia*, because of] our justification” (Romans 4.25). His resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured. He was not raised to *procure* our justification (that was accomplished through His precious shed blood at Calvary), but as *proof* that we are justified.

**4. Dead Saints have perished! v.18:** Again, if Christ is not raised any believers that had died had therefore “perished”. The word perish never means *annihilation* (extinction); it is not loss of *being*, but rather loss of *well-being*. These believers would be suffering the same destiny as unbelievers, still in their sins and in hell – *if* Christ is not raised! **v.19:** The lives of Paul and his associates were full of ceaseless toil and bitter persecution (cf. v.30). If therefore the “hope” (confidence) they had in Christ was restricted to this earthly existence, with no future and eternal hope of resurrection, then they were “most miserable” (pathetic). In fact, more pitiable and deserving of sympathy than anyone in the world! Gromacki says, “For Him, they had given up everything (position in life including prestige, conveniences, and status) to travel all over the Roman world proclaiming a falsehood. They had gambled everything on Him and had lost!”

**5. Programme of Resurrection is cancelled, and Divine Purpose has failed! v.20:** “But now” highlights the glorious contrast to the false premise of the preceding verses. Christ **is** in a permanent, risen state of existence (perfect passive). The phrase “from [*ek*] the dead” caused much puzzlement amongst the disciples when they first heard it from the lips of the Lord (cf. Mark 9.9-10). The Jews believed in a single, resurrection event for all at the end of the age, but the Lord Jesus spoke of being raised ‘out from among’ the dead, suggesting that when He rose, not all the dead would rise at the same time. “In this sense it was a limited resurrection. Every resurrection is a resurrection of the dead, but only that of Christ and of believers is a resurrection from among dead people.” (MacDonald). Christ has been raised as the “firstfruits” of those believers who have fallen asleep (died). This is a reference to the feast of firstfruits which took place at the time of the Passover and was a celebration of the beginning of (barley) harvest (Leviticus 23.9-14). On Passover night, the priest went into the fields in the vicinity of Jerusalem and cut down a sheaf of green corn. It was laid out in the temple on the Sabbath, then waved (presented) before the Lord the following day (the first day of the week). The sheaf of firstfruits was the *pledge* and *guarantee* of a full harvest to follow. Likewise, as the Firstfruits, Christ has

made the resurrection of believers *inevitable*. There **must** be a full harvest to come! The figure of firstfruits implies *life* and *likeness*; indeed, every believer will have a body “like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3.21). There will be both a physical *and* moral resemblance to Christ (cf. 1 John 3.2). Note. The Holy Spirit is also the “firstfruits” (pledge) of the future redemption of our bodies (Romans 8.23). Christ is both “firstfruits” and “firstborn” (Colossians 1.18). “Firstfruits” refers to order in *time*, whereas “firstborn” has the idea of first in rank, dignity and pre-eminence. He is the superior one among those who have risen, the *incomparable*. Though Christ was not the *first* to be raised from the dead (cf. 1 Kings 17), He is the first to be raised to “die no more” (Romans 6.9). Jack Hunter says, “*It is true that others rose before Him but they rose to die again; their bodies were raised to continue life on earth. Christ was the first to rise in power and glory, alive for evermore in His glorified body.*”

**v.21:** From the *analogy* of resurrection (v.20), Paul thinks of the *agency* of resurrection. There was a man, Adam, who introduced death through sin (Romans 5.12). But, by another Man came the “resurrection of the dead”. It is therefore fitting that just as death came through the agency of a man, so the victory over death (by resurrection) should also come by a Man. **v.22:** The use of definite articles, “in the Adam” and “in the Christ” present these two individuals as federal heads – both Adam and Christ *represent* and *affect* others by their actions. The verse also contains a change in preposition from *dia*, denoting *agency* (v.21) to *en*, expressing *association* (v.22). So, death is the common lot of humanity as those who are in natural association with Adam. But all those who possess a spiritual relationship with Christ, through faith, shall be “made alive”. The two “alls” are therefore not co-extensive. Everybody in the Adam family shall die – the whole human race, but everybody in the family of Christ, only believers, shall be made alive. Christ has introduced a new headship in which the damage of Adam has been undone and reversed. Though it is true that Christ will ultimately raise *all* mankind from the dead (John 5.28-29), it is *only* believers in view here as the next verse shows.

**v.23:** The *advent* of the era of resurrection will be at the “coming” [*parousia*] of the Lord Jesus. Every man will be raised according to “his own order”. The word ‘order’ is a military term describing troops organised according to their own rank and regiment. There is nothing haphazard about resurrection! It is a divinely ordered affair. Paul seems to hint at *three* phases of resurrection:

- Christ was raised as the “firstfruits” (pledge) of many to follow.
- “After” this (so far it has been 2,000 years) “they that are Christ’s at his coming [*parousia*]”. The *parousia* is an extended period encompassing the *rapture* (1 Thessalonians 4.15) as well as the *manifestation* (2 Thessalonians 2.8). “They that are Christ’s” likely includes OT saints and those of the church age and is therefore a wider expression than “the dead in Christ” which only includes the church (1 Thessalonians 4.16). Included in this second ‘order’ are therefore church saints who have died and will be raised at the rapture, and tribulation and OT saints who will be raised at the manifestation (at least seven years later), Daniel 12.2. This will complete the “first resurrection” to life (Revelation 20.5).
- “Then” [*eíta*], after an interval (of 1,000 years), the final order of resurrection will take place at “the end” (**v.24**) – this is the resurrection of the wicked dead (Revelation 20.11-15). The word “end” means, in this context, what is *complete* and *fulfilled* – beautifully describing the consummation of time. During the millennial kingdom, Christ will reign with complete authority. He will destroy (abolish) every form of opposition to God and all that is contrary to divine purpose and righteousness. When the final rebellion of Satan, Gog and Magog has been quashed (Revelation 20.7-10), then the Lord Jesus will “deliver up” the kingdom to God the Father. The *mediatorial* kingdom will become the *eternal* kingdom, the throne of David (and the Son of man) shall become the throne of God and of the Lamb.

**v.25:** This verse and v.26 explain *how* the Lord Jesus will “put down all rule and all authority and power” (v.24b). Divine purpose decrees that Christ “must reign until” God has put “all enemies under his feet” – in total subjection to Him (Psalm 110.1). MacArthur says, “*This figure comes from the common practice of kings always sitting enthroned above their subjects, so that when the subjects bowed or kneeled, they were lower than the sovereign’s feet. With enemies, the monarch might put his foot on the neck of a conquered ruler, symbolising that enemy’s total subjugation.*” **v.26:** Included amongst the enemies is “death”. Malcolm Horlock explains, “*Until that moment of final victory, the Lord Jesus is unable to deliver up the subdued kingdom to God – that God might be all in all. In other words, Paul is saying, God’s ultimate and eternal purpose must remain forever unfulfilled – God cannot be all in all – unless first the dead (all the dead) have been raised. Paul rests his case. There must be resurrection!*” The verse literally reads, “the last enemy being destroyed is death” – the process has **already** begun with the victory of Christ over death in resurrection (2 Timothy 1.10; Hebrews 2.14). Death is *being* eradicated and will not have the last word. Thus, we read of both “death” (which claims the *bodies* of men) and “hell” (which claims the *souls* of men) being “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20.14; 21.4). These two tyrants will be finally and eternally vanquished when they are compelled to yield up “all the victims and spoil” they have ever claimed (Horlock). So, every individual will ultimately be raised, whether to eternal life *or* damnation (John 5.29). **v.27:** Paul quotes a second time from the Psalms (8.6) to explain the *first* “when” of v.24. [The *second* “when” of v.24 was explained in vv.25-26]. Psalm 8 refers to the dominion God gave Adam over the earth at creation. Adam lost that

position because of sin, but the second Adam (Christ) will regain and restore universal dominion alongside His bride. Though Christ has been given dominion over all things (Matthew 28:18), the Father who gave Him such authority is obviously excepted. **v.28:** Indeed, after the Lord Jesus has subjugated “all things” (including death) under His authority, “the Son” Himself will remain in subjection to His Father. This is a beautiful reminder of the functional relationship between members of the Godhead. Throughout eternity, the Lord Jesus will continue to function in subjection to His Father. Jack Hunter explains, *“Some have found difficulty in this expression, but once it is noted that the subjection is administrative, not essential, then all is clear. It refers to an official position, not to relationship. He is officially subordinate, and will continue in the eternal state as the divine Administrator, exercising rule as Head. Subjection in this sense does not affect equality in nature. After all, in taking the place of a Servant, the Lord has moved in subordination to the Father to accomplish His will.”*

With Christ having “delivered up” the kingdom to the Father, God will be **supreme** – “all in all”. Thus God will be manifested, acknowledged, glorified and esteemed as supreme by all! All will be subject to Him and exist for His glory. *“God, and the Godhead, will rest in unbroken repose, every enemy having been dealt with, and the whole creation will move into eternal conditions—the struggle and conflict of earth over forever”* (Hoste). The new creation will remain undisturbed by any enemy or subversive element for *eternity* all because once in *history* the Son of God came, died and rose again, breaking the barrier of death. It was the first stage in this great programme of recovery.

## 6. Symbolism of Baptism is undermined! (v.29)

**v.29:** Having taken a slightly extended excursion discussing how resurrection underpins divine and eternal purpose, Paul gives further *doctrinal* (v.29) and *experiential* reasons (vv.30-32) to support his argument. This verse has been given well over 30 different interpretations – it is clearly not easy to explain. We can, however, discount the thoroughly unscriptural Mormon practice of *proxy* baptism in which the living are baptised in the place of dead ancestors who were not Mormons and therefore not baptised.

- Perhaps the most widely accepted view in assemblies today is that of ‘filling up the ranks’. Paul will go on to describe the persecution to which he and other Christians were exposed on an almost daily basis (vv.30-32). As a result, many had been martyred for the faith and the ‘ranks’ of Christians were being thinned. But these ranks were being filled with new converts who were then being baptised and taking the place of the departed “dead” (martyrs). In turn, they were exposing themselves to the danger of persecution for Christ. This was pure folly “if the dead rise not at all”. This view is held by expositors such as Albert Leckie, William MacDonald & William Kelly.
- An alternative view, and one which appears to be much simpler and more in keeping with the symbolism of baptism is well explained by WE Vine. He translates the verse as follows: *“Else what shall they do which are baptized? It is for (in the interests of) the dead, if the dead are not raised at all. Why then are they baptized for them?”* Without resurrection, the whole symbolism of baptism loses its meaning. Vine continues, *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, the ordinance, instead of setting forth the identification of believers with the risen Christ, has no meaning at all either for Him or for them; for all perish at death. Both His command and their witness in the ordinance are null and void. They testify to doctrines that have no significance.”* JM Davies writes, *“Baptism portrays death, burial and resurrection with Christ. If there is no resurrection, baptism loses some of its significance. In such a case it could only symbolise death and burial. What shall they do who are baptised as dead persons if there is no resurrection?”*

## 7. Cost of Serving Christ is not worth paying! (vv.30-32)

**v.30:** The word “jeopardy” means to ‘be in danger’ or ‘run a risk’, and “every hour” is an idiom meaning ‘all the time’. If there is no resurrection, Paul’s constant risking of his own life for the cause of Christ is foolish. **v.31:** *Hourly* risks (v.30) now become *daily* risks. “I die daily” is not a *moral* statement of reckoning oneself judicially dead to sin (cf. Romans 6:11) but a way of describing the physical exposure to danger and death Paul faced every day (cf. Romans 8:36). The possibility of physical harm and martyrdom was real and constant (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). Paul affirms his claim with a kind of oath, *“This is as sure as my boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (NET). Paul rejoices in the believers at Corinth, as testimony to what Christ had done among them through his labours. **v.32:** In this verse, Paul seems to cite a specific instance of risking his life. What “advantage” or benefit would it be for Paul if he “fought with beasts at Ephesus” from a merely human (earthly) perspective, that is, without the hope of the resurrection? Fighting with beasts is not likely to be *literal* as Roman citizens were exempt from being thrown to animals in the gladiator’s ring. The phrase is likely *metaphorical*, regularly being used of human opposition. Paul’s opponents were like fierce animals – cruel and heartless. More generally, the Greeks used the term “wild beasts” to describe a violent, fierce mob. *“It was probably very shortly after dictating these words that two of Paul’s friends, Gaius and Aristarchus, were almost pulled to pieces by the mob (Acts 19:29).”* There were certainly many who opposed Paul in Ephesus (16:9). Again, if there was no resurrection, we would be better off making the most of this life – “let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die”. This was the mantra of the Epicurean school of philosophy (Acts 17:18) and also quotes from Isaiah 22:13 where the Lord pronounces judgment on Jerusalem. Instead of repenting, the people turned to “joy and gladness” (‘outright

celebration', NET). Since judgment and death was imminent, they might as well live for pleasure in the present. Rejecting the doctrine of resurrection therefore opens the way for unbridled sensuality and immorality.

**v.33:** The Corinthians were being deceived by false doctrine which had the potential to lead to moral corruption. "Be not deceived" is in the *present* tense, the Corinthians were to **stop** 'deceiving themselves' or 'allowing themselves to be misled'. "Communications" originally meant *social intercourse* or *fellowship*, then came to designate the *speeches* and *conversation* that developed from that friendliness. In this context, it is either the false teaching, or corrupting company of the false teachers which is in view. "Good manners" describes a person's character or pattern of behaviour (habits). Keeping company with the unsaved will have a corrosive influence on one's own attitudes and behavior. In contrast, hope in the resurrection is sanctifying; it leads to *godly* living, not corruption. **v.34:** Paul summons the Corinthians to immediately "wake" (from sleep or a drunken stupor) to live in a "righteous" (upright) manner. "Come back to your senses!" (NIV). They must "stop" actively sinning both doctrinally and morally. To their "shame" (disgrace), it seems as if the Corinthians were tolerating the *fellowship* and *teaching* of these evil men in their very midst. These were men who did not "know" God. "They were not true believers, but wolves in sheep's clothing, false teachers who had crept in unawares." (MacDonald)