

May 22, 2022

What You Believe About the Resurrection Determines Your Sanity

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

All rests upon the resurrection

The religion of Christianity rests entirely upon the truthfulness of the resurrection of Christ. If Jesus didn't rise, our faith is in vain. On the other hand, naturalism, atheism, and secularism rest entirely upon the falsehood of Christ's resurrection. If Jesus did rise, these philosophies are lies, and it is madness to reject Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. This morning Paul trots out three more arguments to demonstrate that the resurrection of the dead is something that cannot be denied. It is an inescapable concept. Not whether, but which. It's not *whether* you will rise from the dead, but *which* resurrection you will partake of—the resurrection of the just or of the unjust.

Q. 87. What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?

A. We are to believe that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust...The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body; and the bodies of the wicked shall be raised up in dishonor by him, as an offended judge.

The insanity of denying resurrection

Now Paul has already said that if the resurrection is false, Christians are a stupid people. v.19 "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Now he advances the argument in the other direction. Both the Christian and the non-Christian *live as if* they will be raised from the dead. Therefore to deny the resurrection is madness. It is insane.

The Big Idea...

Those who deny the resurrection of the dead live in a dark contradiction and have lost grip with reality

☆ Our Doctrine

☆ Our Duty

☆ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine

The three absurdities of denying resurrection

If you are just joining us in this series then know that Paul was addressing a particular group of people within the Corinthian Church who were denying the resurrection of the dead. Look at v.12 “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, *how can some of you say* that there is no resurrection of the dead?” These were the gnostics in the assembly who were getting their theology from Greek philosophy, not from the Scripture. Paul then trotted out 7 absurdities of denying the resurrection from the Christian perspective. In this section, he trots out 3 absurdities of denying the resurrection from the non-Christian perspective. So let’s take these one at a time.

Absurdity #1: Unbelievers live with a resurrection in view

Look with me at v.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?” His *main* point here is this: *even my opponents believe in the resurrection of the dead because to baptize people for the dead* “...takes for granted that the dead are to rise.”¹ Let’s be clear here, Paul is not endorsing this practice.

¹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 336

He's simply showing how absurd it is to do anything that would help the dead, if the dead cannot be helped. Boys and girls this would be like saying that cows don't exist while you're drinking a glass of milk. Paul would ask you, *how are you drinking milk if cows don't exist?* He's *not* affirming your claim that *cows don't exist*, he's simply showing that *you* don't really believe that cows don't exist since you are drinking their milk.

What is this baptizing for the dead?

Likewise Paul is *not* affirming this practice of baptizing for the dead. This was a practice by the sects who existed in Corinth at the time, notably the Cerinthians and the Marcionites (heretical gnostic groups).² And it is a practice of the Mormon Church today. From their own website:

“...the Lord does not damn those people who, through no fault of their own, never had the opportunity for baptism. He has therefore authorized baptisms to be performed by proxy for them. By performing proxy baptisms in behalf of those who have died, Church members offer these blessings to deceased ancestors. Individuals can then choose to accept or reject what has been done in their behalf.”³

Now this practice has been universally condemned since the early Church for multiple reasons.⁴ 1) Baptism does not save anyone. **Galatians 2:16** “...a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” 2) If a person could be saved through a regular baptism or baptism by proxy, Christ died in vain. **Galatians 2:21** “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if

² *Ibid*, pg. 337

³ Source: https://abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/baptisms-for-the-dead?lang=eng&adobe_mc_ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.churchofjesuschrist.org%2Fstudy%2Fmanual%2Fgospel-topics%2Fbaptisms-for-the-dead%3Flang%3Deng&adobe_mc_sdid=SDID%3D0297159AC2453472-48FBC60A015D246F%7CMCO RGID%3D66C5485451E56AAE0A490D45%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1653157758 Accessed May 21, 2022

⁴ Some sources said it was condemned at the Council of Carthage by I couldn't find original documents.

righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” 3) Once we die, there is no opportunity to repent. **Hebrews 9:27** “...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

Why didn't Paul condemn it?

Someone might ask: ‘Then *why* didn't Paul just come right out and say that baptizing for the dead was illegitimate? Doesn't his silence on the issue condone their behavior?’ Absolutely not. In fact, Paul is distancing himself from the very people practicing this baptism. Look at the specific language of **v.29**. He *doesn't* say ‘why do *we* baptize for the dead?’ He says ‘why do *people* baptize for the dead’. The other translations—NIV, NASB, KJV—make it even clearer asking “what will *those [people]* do” or “what shall *they* do.” He's referring to the same group from **v.12**—the *some* who say there is no resurrection. He's referring to the same group in **v.34**—the *some* who have no knowledge of God.⁵ Paul very much is distancing himself from this practice.

Corollary: modern man lives in a contradiction

So then, how does this connect to the modern man who denies the resurrection of the dead?⁶ Here's the connection: when they deny the resurrection of the dead, their life—just like these who baptized for the dead— involves a great contradiction. What do I mean? What do all men fear? Some men fear heights, others relish them. Some fear spiders, others have them as pets. But all men, without exception fear death.⁷ That is the absurdity. Death is only to be feared if there is a judgment. Death is to be feared if there is a resurrection when all of us will stand before Almighty God and the books are opened. That's why the modern man does everything he can to avoid thinking

⁵ See Hodge, pg. 336-338 for a fuller treatment. I think he adequately handles the objections that Calvin had when he dealt with this passage and gave a more plausible explanation. cf. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 34-38.

⁶ There is another corollary: heresy begets more heresy, you never find one all by itself.

⁷ Hebrews 2:14-15 “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

about his own death. He drowns himself in entertainment, yokes himself to a great cause, becomes a work-aholic, or an addict, or anything that would silence his conscience. The only time the unbeliever has peace is when they can suppress their slavery to the fear of death. But to use Paul's question, we would ask them: why do you fear death if there is no resurrection from the dead? That's the **first absurdity**: all unbelievers live with a resurrection in view.

Absurdity #2: Christians willingly suffer hardships

Paul points to three specific hardships that he has specifically because he preached the resurrection. **First** look at v.30 "Why are we *in danger every hour*?" In **2 Corinthians 11:23-27** Paul gave a long list of all the dangers that he endured because he preached the resurrection including imprisonment, countless beatings, five times being given 39 lashes by the Jews, three times beaten with rods, once being stoned. **Secondly** look at v.31 "I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die every day!*" What does it cost to be a Christian? Everything. The Christian must put to death, his fleshly desires, passions and ambition. Jesus said in **Luke 9:23** "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."⁸ **Thirdly** look at v.32 "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with *beasts* at Ephesus?" What were these beasts that he fought in Ephesus? I take Calvin's view here that Paul was forced into an arena to fight off wild animals for the entertainment of the crowd.⁹ I grant you that the book of Acts doesn't record this, but neither does it record a lot of the other hardships that he mentions in **2 Corinthians 11**. He speaks about this torment in **2 Corinthians 1:8-9**. "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia [Ephesus was in Asia]. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt that we had received *the sentence of death*." If you prefer to take the view that these

⁸ This was Asaph's complaint in Psalm 73. He pursued righteousness at great cost while the wicked enjoyed a carefree prosperous life. It wasn't until he came into the sanctuary that he discerned their end (v.17), i.e. when he saw that they will be raised to judgment.

⁹ cf. Calvin, pg. 40-41

beasts refer to the city-wide riot in **Acts 19** I won't object.¹⁰ The **point** is, that Paul, because of his belief in the resurrection, was forced to fight with actual beasts who sought to tear him apart, or was opposed by men who acted like beasts who sought his death.

“Paul, you are out of your mind”

So here's the question Paul is driving at: why would Paul deprive himself of all the comforts of the flesh, and endure all this torture if the resurrection of the dead was a lie? If the resurrection is a lie, then Festus was right when he said in **Acts 26:24** “Paul, you are out of your mind.” But this isn't just to be said about Paul, but every Christian. Why would any Christian become an object of hatred by the world if the resurrection wasn't true? Why would our Chinese brother Wang Yi of the Early Rain Presbyterian Church continue to preach the resurrection of King Jesus if he knew he would be arrested and taken from his family. Beloved he's been in prison since before COVID was a thing. He has six years left in prison. Where will you be six years from now? If he's still alive, he will be just be getting out of prison. He's out of his mind if the resurrection isn't true. The same thing could be said of John Bunyan, the Puritan who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He spent 12 years in prison for the sake of preaching according to his conscience. His editor said that “It was safer to commit felony than to become a Dissenter. Indeed, a felon was far surer of a fair trial than any Dissenting minister, after the restoration of Charles II.”¹¹ These men must have been out of their minds. But that is not the record of history. Take Paul. By all measures he was a perfectly psychologically stable man. In fact, next to Jesus Christ he was the most compassionate, kind, selfless, patient, long-suffering man in the last 2000 years. He spent himself on the good of others. That is the witness that Christians give to the world. And the world sees it. The early Church Father Tertullian wrote that the pagans were in awe of how the

¹⁰ cf. Hodge, pg. 339-340

¹¹ Quoted from *The Works of John Bunyan*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 120, fn. 2

Christians love “See how they love” they said. They lay down their lives for each other, take care of each other’s needs at their own cost, weep with each other, rejoice with each other, bear with each other and forgive each other. And on top of that they love their enemies, pray for them, endure their cruel persecution. So to return to Paul’s question: what accounts for this? Only a future resurrection. It is madness and insanity to be a Christian otherwise. That’s our **second absurdity**.

Absurdity #3: Human beings are reduced to animals

Look halfway through v.32 “If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”” Notice the quotation marks. Paul is quoting from **Isaiah 22:13**. Isaiah 22 is an oracle against Jerusalem for their rebellion against the LORD. The prophet pronounces doom. But the people did not repent. In essence they said “since we have to die as the prophets say, let’s eat and drink and enjoy ourselves.” This is the philosophy of hedonism. Hedonism says that sensual pleasure is the highest good and proper aim of human life. Essentially it is to be reduced to an animal. Animals don’t have a rational soul. They can’t learn 2 + 2, they can’t read the Bible or pray to God or design skyscrapers. They are purely sensual. They eat, drink, breed, defecate, and sleep. Paul is saying here, that if there is no resurrection, there is no reason to reason anymore. We should live purely for the gratification of our senses. The only moral right in a resurrection-less existence is hedonism. If it pleases you to be a pervert, be a pervert. If it pleases you to be an addict, be an addict. The only moral wrong is to not gratify yourself.

The first evil of hedonism

But there are two great evils that accompany hedonism. The **first evil** is that hedonism always leads to death. This experiment has already been tried in the 60’s—during the age of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. What happened? Well the hippies grew up and got jobs and raised families. In other words, they saw that hedonism didn’t lead to human flourishing. The hippies who didn’t

grow up died young or in prison. The prodigal son cannot stay prodigal unless he wants to die in the pig pen.

The second evil of hedonism

But the **second evil** of hedonism is far worse.¹² Human beings are not animals. We are made with desires that our five senses cannot satisfy. C.S. Lewis said it best:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”¹³

What is *that desire* that no experience in this world can satisfy? God *Himself*. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says that “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart.” And *nothing* but an eternal God can fill that hole. Perhaps you are here this morning and you are one of those people that Paul is talking about, you are a scoffer of the idea of the dead being raised. The world has told you that you would be foolish rube if you became a Christian. But dear friend, the shoe is on the other foot. What have we seen thus far?

You fear death. Why? Because your conscience tells you that you will be raised and face the judgment.

¹² To live as a hedonist is to adopt nihilism: *life without meaning*. And Nietzsche, the father of nihilism, said that to take his principles seriously would land you in an insane asylum. He is the dark prophet of our generation. Because the West has largely adopted hedonism, we have become as Lewis said “men without chests.” We have collectively lost our hearts, our minds, and our whole purpose for living.

¹³ C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY.,: HarperOne, 2002), pg. 76

You have no explanation for the other-worldly love and forgiveness of Christians. It is absurd to think they would endure such hatred if there was no resurrection. You know that.

You have desires that nothing in this world can fill. And it doesn't matter how much pleasure or money or success you achieve it's never enough. You know that.

No it's not foolish to put your trust in Jesus Christ, it's insane¹⁴ not to.¹⁵ Jesus is the friend of sinners. Dear friend that is why He came into the world—to save sinners. You can be saved. You can be reborn. You can be made new. You can be forgiven. You can know God. You can have everlasting life. You can drink from the River of Life. You can be among that number who with tears of joy cry out on the day of their redemption: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”¹⁶ You can be a guest at the eternal wedding feast. You can be welcomed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the New Heavens and New Earth. Trust in risen Christ, and on that day when you rise from the dead, you will rise to life evermore, and your soul will never hunger and thirst again for you will be in the presence of your God. Dear friend, that is the most sound thing you can do. It is madness to deny the resurrection of the dead. It's madness to live like you will not give an account. That's **our doctrine**: Those who deny the resurrection of the dead live in a dark contradiction and have lost grip with reality

¹⁴ “Insane - Unsound in mind or intellect; mad; deranged in mind; delirious; distracted.” Webster's 1828

¹⁵ Jesus said “...he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:36). Ecclesiastes 9:3 “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

¹⁶ Revelation 5:12

II. Our Duty

1. Informatory Use

Our **first duty** is to *take heed* to Paul's warning in **v.33**. "Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Notice the quotes around this little proverb. Scholars believe Paul is quoting an ancient playwright named Menander¹⁷ in his comedy called *Thais*. Now Thais was a real historical figure. She was a hetaira, which was essentially a wealthy, educated prostitute. She was the mistress of Ptolemy I, Alexander the Great's general. After the Greeks defeated the Persians, during their drunken celebration, *Thais* suggested that they burn down Xerxes palace. They thought that was a good idea, so they stormed out and set fire to the palace. But it soon raged out of control and spread and destroyed the whole city. I imagine Paul has that in mind here. These gnostics—these resurrection deniers—in Corinth were just like Thais. Their doctrine would burn down the faith. Paul is telling the Corinthians they were not exempt from their influence. It is any wonder *why* some of them were going to the temple to sleep with prostitutes (**6:16**)? That was a gnostic influence—some taught that it didn't matter what you did with your body. Is it any wonder why some were refusing to give their spouse conjugal rights (**7:3**)? That was a gnostic influence—some taught that you should not engage in any physical pleasure. The bad company of the gnostics was ruining the character of these saints. I remember during the whole emergent church nonsense 15 years ago how these emergent leaders were calling into question doctrines like the atonement, and whether hell was real, or homosexuality was wrong. It was so seductive, especially if your church leadership was promoting it. I remember I had a moment of crisis one night thinking "Maybe hell really isn't real." This bad company was starting to have an influence on me. Praise God He slapped some sense into me. How much of this do we see today? Wokeness has infiltrated the church and many great leaders of yesterday are compromised today. Paul is saying this is a true truth an axiomatic truth a universal law.

¹⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander>

Don't be deceived loved ones: prolonged exposure to bad doctrine will infect you like a contagion. It can burn down your resistance to sin, it can dampen your affections for Christ, it will cause you to backslide, to compromise, to become lukewarm and indifferent.

2. Experimental Use

That brings us to our **second duty**: we must *examine* ourselves. Loved ones what are you exposing yourselves to? What are you being influenced by—good company or bad company? What music are you listening to? What entertainment are you consuming? What news are you reading or watching? What education is your kids receiving? What books are you reading? It's not a question of *whether* you are being influenced, but what are you being influenced by?

3. Admonitory Use

That brings us to our **third duty**: *rebuke*. Look at v.34 "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning." If the Greeks weren't stupefied by their drunkenness they wouldn't have burned down their conquered city. If the Corinthians weren't drunk with gnostic teachings, they wouldn't have had near the amount of problems they had. Loved ones, I think many of us are just plain ignorant of how much these worldly philosophies affect our every day lives. In Pilgrim's Progress, Christian and Hopeful found themselves on rough ground. Now this was the path that Evangelist told them to travel. But Christian saw what he thought was 'easier' path to travel on just over the wall. So he talked his companion into taking a detour. Soon they were lost and couldn't find their way back. A Giant named Despair captured them and took them back to his castle called Doubting Castle and locked them up. It was a most dreadful time for Christian. A time of double-sorrow. Not only because his conscience was pricked for disobeying Evangelist, but also because of the bad company the Giant was. He told them to kill themselves again and again and the despair was so strong that Christian would have taken the counsel

had not Hopeful talked him out of it. When they finally escaped the castle, they found their way back to the King's Highway and their spirits were lifted. Beloved this allegory is so on the nose. Some of you are in a cage of your own doing. You have deceived yourself into thinking that it doesn't matter what path you travel or what ideas you let into your mind. It doesn't matter who you keep company with or who you are taught by or what ideas and entertainment you consume. That's the drunken stupor that Paul is talking about here. If that's you, Paul says "do not go on sinning." The sin the Corinthians were committing was their going off the path. They put themselves under the gnostic giants and it cost them their Christian stability. It cost them their peace. It made them doubt the most fundamental article of the faith: the Resurrection. Now perhaps you're thinking, "I still believe in the resurrection, the company I keep hasn't caused me to doubt that." Perhaps so, but *the question* is this: is the Resurrection still of first importance to you? Is it *the Day* you are living for? Is *the risen Christ* still your first love? You see, Christians can believe in the resurrection, but minimize it, marginalize it, make little of it. That happened to the Corinthians because of who they were being influenced by. Look at the end of v.34 "For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame." They were being influenced by those who didn't know God. Paul said that was shameful. So loved ones, if that is you, if you have let your guard down, if you are keeping company with those who don't know God in what you consume, rebuke yourself. Get back on the King's Highway. You can regain your footing. Your spirit can find strength again. God will lift up your head.

Those are our three duties. 1) We must take heed to Paul's warning that bad company will ruin our character. 2) We must examine ourselves to see what or who we are being influenced by. 3) We must rebuke ourselves if we've come under the spell of those who don't know God.

III. Our Delight

The self-righteous coiner

We need to do a little more work on **v.33**. Please look at it one more time “Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” Paul is *not* saying that if you simply stay away from bad company that you will be good.¹⁸ That if you simply stay away from bad people you won’t be bad. He’s *not* saying that you are the one who is safe, and others are the dangerous ones. There was a pastor in England at the end of 18th century named George Burder. He was called on to witness the execution of three criminals, one was a coiner (that is a counterfeiter of money) and the other two were robbers. Now George Burder remembered this execution in particular because of what the coiner said. As the three men were up on the ladders with the ropes around their necks, the coiner in order to stay his confidence right before he hung uttered these words: “I never killed any body, I never hurt any body—I hope the Lord will have mercy upon me.”¹⁹ Burder recalled, ironically perhaps, that this criminal who was sentenced to death had “...one of the most glaring instances of a self-righteous spirit that I ever knew.”²⁰

You are the bad company

If we misinterpret Paul here, then, like this coiner we will begin to rest our confidence on those things *that we haven’t done*, on those people *that we are not like*. That is not where our confidence rests. Loved ones, this verse isn’t telling us how to get *right* with God: that if we stay away from bad company we will be good. We were the bad company. That’s why Christ came into the world, to save the worst of sinners like you and me. The sexually impure, the drunkard,

¹⁸ On the contrary, Christians are commanded specifically to go to bad people, to the highways and byways, to the proud Pharisees and the promiscuous prostitutes. Paul said “I have made myself a servant to all...that by all means I might save some” (**1 Corinthians 9:19-23**).

¹⁹ John Whitecross, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated From Biography & History*, (London, GB.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), pg. 56

²⁰ *Ibid*

the revilers, the idolaters, the adulterers, the proud and arrogant Pharisee. Do you not know that people *just like you and I* will not inherit the kingdom of God? But we have been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Both you and that coiner will be raised on the last day.

Both you and that coiner will see the books be opened.

Both you and that coiner will stand before the Great White Throne.

Both you and the coiner will hear the final sentence pronounced over you.

The difference, dear saint, is that you will hear those blessed words “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”²¹ Why? Because you are better than the coiner? Because you kept yourself clean? No, in fact, in many ways you are I are probably worse than him. We will hear those words because Jesus stood in our stead. God forgave all our trespasses, by canceling the record of the debt that stood against us by nailing it to that cross. He was crushed for our iniquities. All we like sheep have gone astray...and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And God has demonstrated that He was fully satisfied with the debt Jesus paid by raising Him from dead.

Beer goggles

That’s *why* we are here this morning. Because Jesus rose from the dead. And that’s why Paul warns us to be careful who or what is influencing us. Because to be drunk with false doctrine and loose living is to lose sight of the good news of the gospel. Have you heard of the phrase beer goggles? The phrase describes that phenomenon when under the influence of alcohol others appear more attractive than they actually are. You see under the influence of bad company—of worldly philosophies and false doctrine—sin appears more attractive than it actually is. It’s a distortion. If you find yourself with these

²¹ Matthew 25:34

goggles on, run back to these truths. Meditate on the resurrection of the dead. Meditate on the truth that you have the righteousness of a Man who never sinned. Meditate on the fact that because you have been justified by faith, you have peace with God. Meditate on the truth that you have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, waiting in heaven for you. Meditate on these words that we are about to sing:

Jesus lives, and so shall I.
 Death! thy sting is gone forever!
 He who deigned for me to die,
 Lives, the bands of death to sever.
 He shall raise me with the just:
 Jesus is my Hope and Trust.

Jesus lives and reigns supreme;
 And, His kingdom still remaining,
 I shall also be with Him,
 Ever living, ever reigning.
 God has promised, be it must:
 Jesus is my Hope and Trust.²²

²² [Arr. Andrew Henry] by Lyrics by Christian F. Gellert, 1757, tr. by John Dunmore Lang, 1826...++++