

Proposition: In responding to the attack on the doctrine of the resurrection, we need to deal with two very serious matters according to 1 Corinthians 15:29-34.

- I. We need to deal with some serious questions (29-32).
 - A. There's the question about baptism (29).
 - B. There's the question about hardship (30-32).
 1. Living for Christ involves danger (30).
 2. Living for Christ involves daily death (31).
 3. Living for Christ involves a vicious fight (32).
 4. If there is no resurrection, what's the point?
- II. We need to deal with some serious commands (33-34).
 - A. Stop kidding yourself (33).
 1. The company you keep affects you.
 2. To whom are you listening?
 - B. Start thinking right (34a).
 - C. Stop sinning (34b).
 1. Those who don't are ignorant of God.
 2. Those who don't give cause for shame.

Response: Can you say confidently: "I know whom I have believed."?

Every once in awhile it's good to go back to the basics. A man was once asked, "What do you believe?" He answered, "I believe what my church believes."

"Oh, really?" his friend returned, "What does your church believe?"

He replied, "It believes what I believe."

To which the frustrated friend asked again, "Well, what is it that you and your church believe?"

And the man returned, "Well, we believe the same thing, of course!"

What do we believe as a church? Could you answer that question if asked? First and foremost, we believe the Bible. We believe the Scriptures are God's inerrant and sufficient Word.

Furthermore, we believe in Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Bible. He is the Son of God, the Creator and sovereign Lord of the universe.

What's more, we believe in what Jesus Christ did. He came to earth on a love mission. God became a man and lived for thirty-three years on the earth. By living a perfect life, He met the demands of God's law, and then by sacrificing His life, He paid a ransom payment for all who would believe on Him. Three days later, He arose from the grave victoriously, and forty days after that returned to heaven. He's there now, exalted in heaven as the King. We believe that.

In addition, we believe in what Jesus Christ will do. One day Jesus will return to this earth to take His Bride, judge the world, and then establish His kingdom. The King who is now exalted in heaven will in that day be exalted on the earth, too.

Finally, we believe that every person will spend eternity somewhere. Those who know Christ will live forever with the Savior in the new heavens and new earth. But those who don't know Christ will endure eternal torment in a place the Bible calls the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14).

That's what we believe. We believe it because God's Word teaches it.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Yet some will ask, "But what if it's not true? For example, what if there's no resurrection of the dead? Is that a problem?"

We live in an age of tolerance. We tolerate everything. Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. Everyone's opinion is tolerated in this pluralistic society. Everyone's, that is, except for the person who makes an exclusive claim.

Like Jesus did. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me" Did Jesus say that? Yes, as recorded in John 14:6. That's a radical claim, isn't it? It's an exclusive claim. He claimed to be the *only* way to heaven. He claimed to offer people life beyond the grave, resurrection life.

But what if there is no resurrection, as some say? That's exactly what some were saying in first century Corinth. That's what some were saying *in the church* in Corinth. And that's why Paul penned the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. It was to help people who were confused about this fundamental belief of the Christian faith.

Would you know how to respond to a person who challenged the validity of the resurrection? 1 Corinthians 15 would be the place to go. In his defense of the doctrine of the resurrection, here's the approach Paul took--four defenses...

Defense #1: First, he laid out the gospel in verses 1-12. He showed that the resurrection of Christ is at the heart of the gospel which we have received and on which we have taken our stand (1). Christ died and was raised on the third day (3-4). Those are historical events verified by eyewitness account.

Defense #2: Next, in verses 13-19 Paul demonstrates how the resurrection of the dead in general is linked to the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 13, "But if it is preached that Christ had been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" And verse 19, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." But this isn't just a personal thing, as defense #3 addresses.

Defense #3: In verses 20-28 Paul shows how the doctrine of the resurrection is rooted in God's eternal, redemptive plan. It's at the heart of what God is doing to reclaim His world and establish His kingdom. The first man, Adam, committed cosmic treason. But the second Adam, Jesus Christ, came to reverse the curse. Verse 22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

And when it comes to the resurrection, God works in an orderly fashion, as verse 23 reveals, "But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (24) Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father."

But Paul has one more defense to present. It's the one before us today. It's the rhetorical approach. To this point he has used the theological argument. Now, in verses 29-34 he turns to the argument of Christian experience.

In essence, here's what we'll see. In responding to the attack on the doctrine of the resurrection, we need to deal with two very serious matters according to 1 Corinthians 15:29-34.

I. We need to deal with some serious questions (29-32).

Sometimes a good question can go a long way in helping make sense of a problem. You'll notice that Paul uses a series of probing questions in verses 29-32. Why the questions? They're not questions for information. They're questions to make a point.¹

¹"What's for supper?" is a question for information. But when a mother asks her 7 year old, "Do you know what will happen if you don't come to supper right *now*?" it's a question to make a point!

Paul used questions to alarm the Corinthian Christians of the grave danger of denying the doctrine of the resurrection. To do so he raises questions pertaining to two issues.

A. There's the question about baptism (29). "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?"

You'll notice it's a two part question, first *what* followed by *why*. Beyond that, the verse raises as many questions as it answers! What practice does Paul have in mind with this reference to "baptizing for the dead?" Commentator Gordon Fee states that at least *forty* different explanations have been offered! Leon Morris says, "This reference to baptism *for the dead* is a notorious difficulty (218)."

The point Paul's making is clear enough--whatever some were doing in Corinth, it was futile if there is no resurrection of the dead. But what were they doing?

A straightforward reading of the text indicates some people were being baptized "for" other people who had died. The problem is twofold, as Leon Morris points out: 1) There is no historical or biblical precedent for such baptism. The NT is otherwise completely silent about it; there is no known practice in any of the other churches nor an any orthodox Christian community in the centuries that immediately follow.²

2) The second problem is theological. Elsewhere Paul teaches forcefully that justification is by grace through faith, not works (Eph. 2:8-9). And it involves a *personal* response--someone else cannot do it for you. So you can't be baptized to save someone else.

But apparently, there was a practice in Corinth in which some believers were undergoing a vicarious baptism in behalf of others who had died. What exactly were they doing? One interpretation says believers were getting baptized in order to fill up the vacant places left in the church which the dead have left--in other words, a new convert was baptized and brought into the church to replace the veteran that God took home to heaven. Another suggestion is that some people were martyred after becoming a Christian but before being baptized--so others were baptized in their stead.

William Barclay suggests it refers to a superstitious custom that apparently some Corinthians practiced, but eventually passed out of the church. He calls it "vicarious baptism," and explains (153), "If a person died who had intended to become a member of the Church and was actually under instruction, sometimes someone else underwent baptism for him...Here Paul neither approves nor disapproves that practice. He merely asks if they can be any point in it if there is no resurrection and the dead never rise again."

That's what we must not miss from verse 29. We'll never know for sure this side of heaven what exactly the Corinthians were doing. But Paul knew. And they knew. Paul doesn't endorse what they were doing--he does distance himself from it by saying it's what "they" do, not him. Here he refers to their practice to make a point.³

To his Corinthian brothers he asks, "Why would you go through vicarious baptism if there is no resurrection? It doesn't make sense." He moves to a second, more personal issue in verses 30-32.

B. There's the question about hardship (30-32). "And as for us [notice again that he excludes himself from the practice in verse 29], why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ

²Leon Morris, 764.

³Leon Morris states (218), "That Paul is quite capable of reasoning from a practice of which he disapproves is shown by 8:10, where he refers to sitting at meat in an idol's temple without showing it to be wrong in itself, though that he believed this is clear from 10:21ff.

Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"

Is it easy to be a Christian? It is *not*. Living for Christ involves a series of hardships which Paul experienced and mentions here.

1. *Living for Christ involves danger (30)*. "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour (KJV)?" Have you ever put yourself in danger for Christ? We enjoy great freedom. That's the exception, not the norm. There's a price to pay for identifying with Christ in a world under the rule of the evil one who hates Christ. Is it worth it?

Not according to Paul. Remember these words from verse 19, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

Paul said "we endanger ourselves every hour." *We* do. Who's *we*? It includes Paul, Sosthenes (who co-authored the letter, 1:1), and Timothy (who Paul mentions twice in the letter; 4:17; 16:10). And by extension the "we" includes all who are serious about living for Christ.

Living for Christ involves danger. How often? Paul said he faced danger "every hour." He lived knowing every hour could be his last hour of freedom, and even life itself.

Most of us don't live that way, do we? Do you think we'd be different if we did? If you knew you'd see Jesus *tomorrow* would it affect your life *today*?

Think of a young lady whose engaged to be married. Is her life affected by the fact that a day is coming soon when she will meet a young man at the altar? Indeed, her life revolves around preparation for that event. Her life is consumed with the fact that the "big day" is coming. She wants to be ready for that meeting.

Are you looking forward to meeting Jesus? Are you living like you are? Listen. If the "big day" is not coming, if there is no resurrection day, then Christianity makes no sense. But the day is coming. And *that* day is our incentive for facing hardship in *this* day. Living for Christ involves danger. Secondly...

2. *Living for Christ involves daily death (31)*. In verse 31 Paul shifts from the plural "we" to the singular "I." "I die every day." I die *daily*.

Is the Christian life dangerous? Beloved, Paul said he not only faced danger, but death itself. And he faced it *daily*. He's not exaggerating to make a point either.

The Corinthians knew that. They owed their eternal hope to Paul. Paul risked his life to bring the gospel to them. The Corinthians were special to Paul. IN verse 31 he says, "I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the Corinthians well remembered the abuse Paul endured to introduce them to Christ.

Turn to Acts 18. Verse 1 indicates Paul left Athens and traveled to Corinth, a city of over 650,000 people. As was his strategy (verse 4), every Sabbath he went to the synagogue to persuade people to trust Christ.

What happened? Don't overlook verse 6, "But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive." What did Paul face in Corinth? The same thing he endured wherever he went--opposition and abuse.

So what did Paul do, leave town? No. He went next door, kept preaching, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized (7-8)!

And then the Lord gave Paul a special message (9): "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. (10) For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." So Paul stayed and taught the Word of God for a year and a half.

But it was no cakewalk. Verse 12 indicates the Jews made a "united attack on Paul and brought him into court." You say, "Hold on! I thought God told Paul it would be okay. Why didn't God protect Paul from going to court?"

Here's a key insight into how God works. Our God does not always keep us *from* trouble, but sometimes takes us right *through* it. And in so doing, He has a purpose. He wants to use the trouble to help us know Christ better and make Christ better known, and all for His glory.

In Paul's case, God let Paul go to court. And then God worked through the proconsul, Gallio. Gallio threw Paul's critics out of court (16), and Paul was permitted to keep on preaching Christ (18).

Yes, Paul faced death every day. His goal in life wasn't to have an easy day. It wasn't to avoid the threat of danger and potential death for Christ. He lived every day with this passion (Galatians 2:20):

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I but Christ that lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Every day he died to himself so that Christ could live through him. Is that the way you view the Christian life? Listen to Jesus's invitation (Luke 9:23), "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Living for Christ involves danger and daily death. Thirdly...

3. *Living for Christ involves a vicious fight (32)*. It did for Paul, and the Corinthians knew that. Do you know where Paul went after he left Corinth? He went to Ephesus. Do you know what happened to him there? According to Acts 19, we learn that he nearly faced a mob-lynching in Ephesus.

In fact, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus towards the end of his three year ministry there. He had a fruitful ministry in Ephesus. And he also faced perhaps the most vicious fight of his life.

In Acts 19:23 Luke records this observation about Paul's ministry in Ephesus, "About that time there arose a *great disturbance* about the Way." Don't minimize those words.

In our text (1 Cor. 15:32) Paul says he "fought wild beasts in Ephesus." More than likely, the wild beasts were people, hostile and hateful people. People like the businessman, Demetrius, who wanted to eliminate Paul and his Christ (Acts 19:24). Demetrius turned the city into a furious mob (28). Acts 19:29 says "the whole city was in an uproar." That's more than a quarter of a million people (acc. to I.S.B.E.).

How bad did it get for Paul? That may be the experience Paul has in mind as he writes these words in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia [Ephesus was the key city in Asia Minor--in modern day Turkey, not far from the current conflict in Kosovo]. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death [the fight was vicious!]. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God [don't miss the next four words] *who raises the dead*. He had delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us."

What kept Paul going as he faced danger and daily death, and what gave him hope as fought the furious fight? It was the hope of the resurrection. He said he relied on the God who raises the dead. To put it bluntly...

4. *If there is no resurrection, what's the point?* Verse 32, "If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?" Paul didn't do ministry

merely for "human reasons" [KJV, "after the manner of men"]. What drives us in ministry isn't merely to make things better for people in this life alone. It's to help people get ready for eternity. That's the difference between biblical ministry and humanitarian efforts.

But if this life is all there is, what's the point? If the dead are *not* raised, would you face beasts in Ephesus? Only a masochist would make that choice. If there's no resurrection, then there's only one logical conclusion: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

That's a quotation of Isaiah 22:13. It's also Jesus' assessment of the motto of the rich fool in Luke 12:19. "Eat, drink, and die." There are a lot of people living by that motto. And that's the fitting approach to life *if* there's no resurrection, *if* this life's all there is. If that's the case, then why not live it up?

Why not? Because that's *not* the case. This life is not all there is, and to put it bluntly, we're in big trouble if we're living like it is. Which brings us to the second serious matter with which Paul responds to the attack on the doctrine of the resurrection.

II. We need to deal with some serious commands (33-34).

Paul's series of questions leads to a series of exhortations. In fact, notice how the pronouns change in this section. In verse 29 it's "them." In verses 30-32 it's "we" and "I." But in verses 33-34 the emphasis is on "you." First Paul talked about others, then himself, and now he turns the spotlight on his Corinthian brothers, *you*.

In light of the truth of the resurrection, Paul puts three commands on the table.

A. Stop kidding yourself (33). "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" Don't be misled. Be not deceived. The Greek verb is *planasthe* which literally means "to cause to wander." We get the word "planet" from it, a fitting word to describe those wandering objects that orbit the sun.

Here the verb is passive. Don't let someone cause you to wander. The tense indicates it was already happening, and it was happening *in* the church. Remember verse 13? "How can *some of you* say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" And how can the rest of you listen? Stop kidding yourself! Know this...

1. *The company you keep affects you.* "Bad company corrupts good character." That was a popular proverb from the Greek poet Menander. It's true. Who you associate with affects you.

Hang around with skeptics, and it will affect you. Chum up with a critic, and what happens? Keep company with a person of loose morals, and the effect is the same.

Don't kid yourself. The company you keep affects you. The Corinthians were listening to voices they should have been shunning. May I ask you a question?

2. *To whom are you listening?* I'm thinking now of a good friend who got messed up because he listened to the wrong voices. It's true, the company you keep affects you.

This principle can work for your advantage, too. According to Hebrews 10:25, hang around with God's people and it will help you grow! So command #1--don't kid yourself.

B. Start thinking right (34a). "Come back to your senses as you ought." In the KJV, it's "Awake to righteousness." The verb means "to be sober" and depicts what happens to a person after drunkenness. He sobers up. He comes back to his senses. He starts thinking right again.

That's what people who fiddle with false doctrine need to do. Sober up and start thinking right. And command #3...

C. Stop sinning (34b). Verse 34 concludes, "And stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame."

Listen. Wrong thinking (about the resurrection doctrine or any other fundamental, biblical truth) will inevitably lead to wrong behavior (see David Prior). Doctrine leads to conduct. Unsound doctrine leads to unwholesome living (Morris). Show me a person who isn't *living* right and I'll show you a person who isn't, first, *thinking* right.

That's why we need to be in the Word of God *consistently*. That's why we need the public teaching of the Scriptures that church provides.

The Corinthians had some choices to make. They needed to stop kidding themselves, to start thinking right, and to stop sinning. As Warren Wiersbe puts it, "It was time for the Corinthians to *wake up* and *clean up*."

What's true of people who don't? You'll notice two things in verse 34.

1. *Those who don't are ignorant of God.* As the KJV puts it, "They have not the knowledge of God." The Greek word is *agnosian* from which we get "agnostic."

This is serious. When a person refuses to stop sinning, whether it's a sin of wrong thinking or wrong living, it indicates that person has a fundamental problem. He or she is *ignorant* of God. He may go to church (as the Corinthians were doing). She may serve in the nursery. But if a person refuses to submit his mind and life to the Word of God, he is a practical agnostic. He shows that in his heart he is ignorant of God. Something else is true of people who refuse to wake up and clean up...

2. *Those who don't give cause for shame.* Paul concludes with these words, "I say this to your shame."

That's not very nice--or is it? It's called speaking the truth in love. Beloved, to have church members who deny the resurrection--that's shameful. To be a church that tolerates unbiblical thinking and unbiblical living is cause for shame. And that's the very reason Paul says he spoke so bluntly to the Corinthians. He did it to shame them into action.

Suppose a train is heading down the tracks. One of the cars is full of people having a party. They're having a grand time. What they don't know, but you do, is that there's a bridge out up ahead. Sure, they're having a great time now, but they're heading for destruction, and you know it. What's the loving thing to do? Would you say, "Ah, they're having such a fun time. I hate to bother them and ruin their party."? No! You'd do everything in your power to warn them of the impending danger, wouldn't you?

The truth is, the train of life is heading down the tracks. And the bridge is out.

And some will say, "Ah, don't be a stick in the mud. If you want to believe that stuff about Jesus, go ahead. But what right do you have to insist others do the same? They're having a good time. Don't bother them."

Listen. Why must we die every day to make Christ known? Why must we insist sinners repent? Why must we take risks in urging wayward church members to wake up and clean up?

Why? It's because we know that the bridge is out. Eternity is coming. And one day every person will enter eternity and face the resurrected Christ. We know.

Years ago Daniel Whittle penned these words, "I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He hath made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for His own. But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day."

Response: Can you say confidently: "I know whom I have believed."?