

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

I went to a psychologist friend and said if 500 people claimed to see Jesus after he died, it was just a hallucination. He said hallucinations are an individual event. If 500 people have the same hallucination, that's a bigger miracle than the resurrection. (Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ)

- I. Christ's resurrection needs to stay central to our beliefs. 15:12-19
- II. Christ's resurrection is a precursor to the total defeat of death. 15:20-28
- III. Christ's resurrection gives us the power to live for him now. 15:29-34

Christ's resurrection points to our resurrection; our resurrection gives meaning to this present life.

- I. Christ's resurrection needs to stay central to our beliefs. 15:12-19
 - A. Some of the Corinthians had apparently begun to doubt the reality of the resurrection. Since no such hope was offered by ancient Greek paganism or their mystery religions, it was probably a hard truth for many of the Corinthians to grasp. Paul emphasizes to them that the resurrection is all-important. The Christian faith rests upon historical fact.
 - B. Not everyone agrees with Paul:

John Dominic Crossan, professor emeritus of religious studies at Chicago's DePaul University, [and one of the founders of the controversial Jesus Seminar] said: "If the bones were found tomorrow, would it destroy Christian faith? It certainly would not destroy my Christian faith. I leave what happens to bodies up to God." [\[See Montreal Gazette, February 26, 2007\]](#)

- C. By contrast, in the 1800s we may note the interesting story of the law professor Simon Greenleaf:

Greenleaf, one of the principle founders of the Harvard Law School, originally set out to disprove the biblical testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was certain that a careful examination of the internal witness of the Gospels would dispel all the myths at the heart of Christianity. But this legal scholar came to the conclusion that the witnesses were reliable, and that the resurrection did in fact happen. (From [a paper accessible at UMKC School of Law](#))

The result was another important book: *The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice*, in which he argues for the truth of the resurrection.

- D. More recently, in the 20th Century, Josh McDowell tried to do the same thing: disprove the resurrection. He said:

Everything that Jesus taught, lived, and died for depended upon one thing: His resurrection ... My conclusion was, if I can show that Christ did not rise from the dead then my case was won against Christianity, but I was not able to do it. (See PDF)

That failed quest turned into perhaps McDowell's most well-known book: *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

- E. The Bible's emphasis on resurrection is especially noteworthy in view of the fact that no such hope was offered by ancient paganism or mystery religions. Christ's resurrection was proclaimed as evidence of the effectiveness of His death in securing our salvation, and as evidence that one day we believers in Christ will also be raised.

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II. Christ's resurrection is a precursor to the total defeat of death. 15:20-28

- A. 15:20 Regarding the resurrection, Christ is the "firstfruits". Christ is the example. Christ is the prototype. What has happened to him is going to happen to all of us who have trusted him for our eternity.
- B. 15:21-22 God did not create us inevitably to die. The problem began with Adam and all of us continue to feel the consequences. The problem has been solved by Jesus, who now offers us eternal life.
- C. 15:23 But Paul now explains that God is working out a plan. Death, which majorly interferes with God's perfect will for our eternity, needs to be neutralized. We read about that in Revelation 21:

*Revelation 21:3-4 NKJV*³ *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

- D. God offers this hope because He feels our own personal tragedies. This is all the more relevant in the face of gigantic disasters like this week's earthquake in Haiti.

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III. Christ's resurrection gives us the power to live for him now. 15:29-34

A. 15:29 This is one difficult verse to understand.

i. A very reputable Greek scholar from the 1800s (Vincent) had this to say:

*"Concerning this expression, of which **some thirty different explanations** are given, it is best to admit frankly that we lack the facts for a decisive interpretation. None of the explanations proposed are free from objection."*

ii. A more recent commentary, from 1983, says the following:

"Up to 200 explanations have been given of this verse! Most of these interpretations are inane ..." (Bible Knowledge Commentary; Walvoord & Zuck, ed.; Chariot Victor)

iii. In the last over 100 years, the number of poor explanations has increased. Rather than add to the confusion, allow me to say simply that it was some weird practice that was going on in the region of Corinth. They knew what Paul was talking about, but "baptism for the dead" is not so much as referred to again by Paul or any other writer in the Bible. Therefore, it's nearly impossible for us to know what he was talking about.

B. 15:29-34 As we've seen throughout this book, many within the Corinthian church were living morally compromised lives. They looked more like the old life of sin than the new life that Christ had given them. We can certainly fall into that same trap.

C. A life of sacrifice and self-sacrifice is perhaps the best evidence there is that someone who says they believe in Jesus truly believes. A continuing life of sin can be evidence that we never knew God to begin with.

D. Paul elaborates on this same point back in Romans Chapter 6. What he says there ties in well with this passage:

Rom 6:5-14 NKJV ⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

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Conclusions:

1. The Difference between Truth and Sincerity: The resurrection of Christ is presented in the Bible as historical fact. If it is not true then the Bible has nothing to offer. Paul reinforces this in **15:14 & 17**. He invites the Corinthians – and us – us to examine the evidence and wants the Corinthians – and us – to stake our eternity on the validity of this claim.
2. Because Christ has risen, we can embrace a similar hope. We can look forward to a flawless, sinless new body, equipped for eternal life.
3. The power to live beyond ourselves: Because that eternal life – that new life in Christ – begins within us right now, we can experience victory over sin and temptation – even during this present existence.

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