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**GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS**  
 #38

**IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED**  
**1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19**

**INTRODUCTION**

To properly understand this portion of Scripture, we must remember the Corinthians' theological error; some of them were saying that there is no future resurrection from the dead. They were not denying Jesus' bodily resurrection, but they were denying its effect, the future bodily resurrection of all believers. The Corinthian error was probably rooted in the idea that they had already reached a level of super "spirituality" because they possessed the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, even calling tongues the language of the angels (1 Corinthians 13:1). They came to see themselves as existing in a sort of angelic state where no future resurrection was required to complete the salvation which God has begun in them. What Paul points out in today's text is that their denial of any sort of future resurrection was essentially a denial of Christ's resurrection since the two resurrections are so closely linked (vv12-13). The passage begins in verse 12 by pointing out that in the church at Corinth, some were saying, *there is no resurrection of the dead*. They stated this as an absolute fact; none rises from the dead. Then in verse 13 Paul points the logical consequence of their rationale *If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised*. And then he gives five consequences if this is true. Paul writes here the hypothetical effects of their twisted logic. What if Christ had not been raised? What are logical consequences of such an idea?

**1. OUR PREACHING IS VAIN & WE ARE FALSE WITNESSES (15:14-16)**

If Christ has not been raised, then all Christian preaching is empty of both meaning and power. It is not rooted in any historical reality and it lacks the life-giving power it claims to possess. Certainly, the Gospel which Paul preached included Jesus' resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-11) and certainly the Apostles believed that message contained the power to bring about spiritual "resurrections" in those who heard it with faith. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3)*. In Ephesians, Paul writes, *4But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6)*. And to the Colossian believers, Paul writes, *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1)*. But if Christ has not been raised, then both the basis and effect of the message is empty.

Paul understands that the Father is ultimately behind the resurrection of His Son. Yes, Jesus had the power to lay down His life and take it up again [John 10:17-18], but the Father also played a crucial role in raising Jesus from the dead [1 Corinthians 6:14; Acts 2:24]. The Father raised the Son as a vindication of His Son's perfect life and substitutionary death. In other words, Jesus' resurrection was proof that redemption was completed, God's wrath was propitiated and Jesus

had truly finished the work that His father gave Him to do. Without the resurrection, the Christian Gospel is incomplete and essentially, empty.

## **2. YOUR FAITH IS VAIN AND WORTHLESS (15:14, 17)**

If the message preached is empty, then it naturally follows that their faith in that message is empty (v14) and worthless (v17). We are not Christian because we try really hard to be like Jesus. We are Christians because we believe the message about Jesus, the message which the Apostles preached. If any part of that message is false, then their preaching and our faith rest on empty, meaningless words. Our faith is only as good as its object. If we have a sinless, crucified, risen and ascended Savior, then our faith is more valuable than gold [1 Peter 1:7]. If we have a man who was only a teacher and visionary who managed to get Himself killed, and he possessed no power over death, then our faith is useless and worthless. The validity of our faith is inseparably linked to the validity of the Gospel message. There are many sincere people who have useless faith because they believe a false message of salvation. Paul teaches that if Jesus was not raised, then Christians must be included in that category.

## **3. WE ARE STILL IN OUR SINS (15:17)**

If the Christian message is empty and our faith is empty and worthless, then we must conclude that *we are still in our sins*. There is no saving Gospel without the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We cannot speak of the cross apart from the resurrection. We must recognize that the cross and the empty tomb comprise one great saving act of God. In Romans 4:25, Paul writes, *He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification*. Jesus' resurrection is not only connected to our resurrection, but it is vitally connected to our present justification.

On the cross, Jesus paid for our sin in full. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the verification that His death was all God required for sinners to be forgiven. So Christ's obedience to God's plan of redemption was authenticated when God raised Jesus from the dead. We are called to believe in Jesus, our living and triumphant Savior. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, our justification was secured even though it was not effective in our lives until we believed. When God placed His Son on the cross and then raised Him from the dead, God had our justification in view. These things were accomplished for us.

The immediate consequence of believing in Jesus is our justification. When God sees faith, He credits me with the righteousness of Jesus because my faith links me to Jesus in a way that saves me. This imputation of righteousness to me is an instantaneous, everlasting transaction that God graciously accomplishes in my life. Having believed, I am now counted as righteous and treated as righteous. Therefore, I will not face the final wrath of God because of my sin. But none of this is true apart from Jesus' resurrection.

## **4. THOSE BELIEVERS WHO HAVE ALREADY DIED HAVE PERISHED (15:18)**

If Christ has not been raised, then our message is empty of meaning and truth. More than that, our faith in that message is worthless; we have entrusted ourselves to a dead man. It follows then that we are still in our sins, under the just wrath of God. Therefore, when we die, we perish. Notice that Paul emphasizes perishing as the result of dying apart from justifying grace. We do not cease to live, we perish. Romans 5:8-9 explains the eternal effects of the Gospel, *8But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him*. The

Gospel saves us from the wrath of God. If there is no Gospel, we perish. Either our sins are atoned for in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus or the penalty is paid in hell for eternity.

This perishing is the permanent removal from God's presence in hell. The word "hell" occurs 12 times in the New Testament. Eleven of these times, it was Jesus who spoke of hell. Hell is not a fictitious place that religious people made up to scare sinners into heaven. Hell is eternal separation from the presence and pleasures of God.

Some may ask, "Why is hell eternal"? Think of it this way; a crime is wicked and blameworthy in direct proportion to the worth of the one assaulted. So there are no penalties for killing mosquitoes. However, if you kill dogs with the same disregard, you will get into trouble. And you will be in worse trouble if you do the same thing with prize-winning racehorses. If you assault a person, your guilt increases in the same way because the worth of a person is greater than the worth of an animal.

So when you assault the glory of God by ignoring God, neglecting God, and disobeying God, the punishment must fit the crime. Since God is infinitely greater and more valuable than any person, a crime committed against Him demands punishment beyond measure. Because God's glory is infinite, the punishment for assaulting that glory must be infinite as well. Therefore, hell must be everlasting punishment.

##### **5. BELIEVERS ARE THE MOST PATHETIC OF ALL PEOPLE (15:19)**

Christians have trusted Jesus to provide a glorious future resurrection to eternal and ever increasing joy in the presence of God. That is our certain hope and expectation. This expectation of future joy saturates our lives. Paul writes, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)*. Again he says, *1For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-2)*. Our future hope gives us courage to face the trials of this life; *6Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- 7for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)*. This courage deeply motivates us to obey Jesus in spite of the costs. Paul writes, *23Are they servants of Christ?--I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Paul lived his life with his future resurrection in view.*

Jesus taught us to live in the light of a future resurrection. *12And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13" But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of*

*the righteous.”* <sup>15</sup>When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God (Luke 14:12-15)!” Jesus linked our motivation to sacrifice, serve, suffer, and genuinely love others to our expectation of a future resurrection where we will be richly rewarded for these acts of faithful obedience. But if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, we not only have no future hope, we have no present forgiveness. That means we have no present peace with God or future hope of joy. We are the most pathetic of all people. Our whole existence is empty and meaningless.

### **CONCLUSION**

If one denies Jesus’ resurrection, he essentially denies the Christian faith. Paul is pointing to Jesus and declaring that the center of all Christianity is the confession that Jesus is the risen Lord. Christianity is not trying to follow the teachings of Jesus as one would try to follow the teachings of Mohammad or Buddha. Christianity is believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord over all. It is believing that God took on flesh, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to absorb His own wrath and arose again to prove that He reigns over all, even death. To deny any fundamental aspect of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is to forsake the saving Gospel. Therefore, we must continue to believe in and proclaim the resurrected Lord Jesus. To believe in Jesus’ resurrection and ours is to embrace a life of joyful, sacrificial obedience because we expect to be repaid at that future resurrection.