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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
 #40

LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF OUR FUTURE RESURRECTION
1 CORINTHIANS 15:29-34

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 15 is comprised of fairly sophisticated and tightly-woven theological arguments concerning the future resurrections of believers in Jesus. First of all, Paul argues that the past resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of the Good News (vv1-11). The cross and the empty tomb comprise the one great saving act of God in redemptive history; neither can be denied if the Gospel is truly Good News (vv12-19). Paul then argues that Jesus' resurrection necessarily proves the future resurrection of His people (vv20-28). God's plan of redemption is not complete until death is finally defeated and the resurrection is the death of death.

Today's passage is not a sophisticated, tightly-woven theological argument on the resurrection. Instead, it is a practical exhortation concerning how to live in the light of our future resurrection. I want to commend you, the covenant members of GRBC, for your enthusiasm for hearing sophisticated, tightly-woven theological arguments explained as best I can do it. In a day when such explanations are not generally highly valued, you should be commended for seeing their importance and taking the time to understand the Scriptures.

Paul has labored to make sure the Corinthians understand both Jesus' resurrection and how it guarantees their future resurrection. If the resurrection is true, and it is, Paul wants us to know it must impact how we live. We will be raised to eternal life. We will give an account to Jesus concerning how we lived. At that point, priorities will be clarified; obligations will become clear. Accomplishments will be put into proper perspective. In short, we will see our lives from Jesus' point of view and everything about our lives will become abundantly clear in a way that we have never previously experienced. So how must we live in light of our future resurrection?

1. IN SPITE OF SOME MEMBERS, THOSE WITHIN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH DEMONSTRATED THAT THEY BELIEVED IN A FUTURE RESURRECTION (15:29)

1 Corinthians 15:29 is a difficult verse to say the least. It is impossible to know precisely what *baptized for the dead* means here. Whatever it was, the very fact that the Corinthians were doing it, indicated to the Apostle that they believed in an after-life of sorts. I must mention that neither Jesus, nor the Apostle, ever endorse any participation in any kind of sacrament on behalf of the dead. Today, the Mormons practice this custom as a part of their religion, but the New Testament never endorses such a thing.

2. BELIEVING THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION MUST AFFECT OUR LIVES IN THE MOST PRACTICAL WAYS (15:30-34)

(2.1) A willingness to take risks for God's kingdom (15:30-32)

Paul's point here is to point out the absurdity of his lifestyle if there is no future bodily resurrection. He describes himself as being in danger every hour (v30). Essentially, Paul's lifestyle causes him to face the reality of death on a daily basis (v31). To face death so often for the Gospel's sake, one must first die a thousand deaths to the comforts which this life affords. One specific example is in verse 32 where Paul cites fighting wild beasts at Ephesus. Most likely, Paul uses metaphorical language here describing the numerous dangers he faced while preaching in Ephesus.

No one will likely accomplish much within God's kingdom who refuses to take risks. Because I don't want this to be theoretical risks only, let me try to bring this closer to home. To follow Jesus, we must risk relationships that are precious to us. Remember how Jesus talked to His disciples, *16"But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, 17and you will be hated by all because of My name. 18"Yet not a hair of your head will perish. 19"By your endurance you will gain your lives (Luke 21:16-19).* Jesus also taught us to risk with our money. *2"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:2-4).* In fact, Jesus calls us to risk our very lives if necessary. *28"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).* Jesus sums up this idea with these words, *28And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. 30"But many who are first will be last; and the last, first (Matthew 19:28-30).*

It's never right to tell God that something is "off-limits" from Him. Nothing can be so precious that we forbid God from using it as He pleases. The motivation for such obedience is, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15, our future resurrection; or as Jesus put it, *you will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.*

(2.2) Intentionally placing ourselves under godly influences (15:33)

If we are to live in the light of our future resurrection, we must surround ourselves with people who encourage us to do this. This does not come naturally and most of us don't discover the joys of sacrificial obedience apart from clear examples of this. This would be a great time to exhort you to not only read the stories of the Bible because God's kingdom has been built on the back of those who joyfully sacrificed and their stories are designed to motivate us to do the same. But this would also be an ideal time to exhort you to read church history. One such example is John G. Patton, a Scottish preacher turned missionary to an unreached people on the New Hebrides Islands. Cannibals inhabited the islands and a sustained Christian witness was almost thought impossible. Patton spent over 40 years there as the first Gospel witness. He would bury his wife and at least one child on that island as he tried to bring the Good News to the natives. His example came early, from a very simple father. Patton wrote: *"How much my father's prayers at this*

time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in family worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen World to the service of Jesus . . . As we rose from our knees, I used to look into the light on my father's face, and wish I were like him in spirit, -- hoping that, in answer to his prayers, I might be privileged and prepared to carry the blessed Gospel to some portion of the Heathen world." Men like John G. Patton do not come from nowhere; they most often have the good gift of an example.

Paul's concern for the Corinthians stems from those who deny the future resurrection. If their words are true, then one should eat, drink and die (v32). And even though their words are not true, they still have the power to diminish the Corinthians' hope in their future resurrection. This bad influence can come from casual acquaintances or from spiritual leaders who promote this life only. I think the latter group may be Paul's concern here; there are some teaching no future resurrection. Paul sees disastrous consequences for believers who become overly influenced by bad theology. So we must guard our friendships and our spiritual influences.

(2.3) A clear-minded understanding of sin (15:34)

Paul sums us this practical counsel by calling the Corinthians to a sober-mindedness and a clear perspective. We must measure this life in light of standing before Jesus in a raised, glorified body. *27And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him (Hebrews 9:27-28).* We must keep our future resurrection in mind if we are to cultivate a sober-mindedness concerning life and death.

This kind of thinking necessarily leads us to *stop sinning*. At some point in this journey, we must arrive at that place where we make it our aim to stop sinning. I fully realize this is impossible in its totality. We are regenerate sinners, nevertheless, we are sinners. We cannot be perfected in this life. But we should think soberly about sin.

Jim Elliff has provided a helpful little paper called **35 Reasons Not To Sin**. I think his intention is to help us think soberly about sin and to promote a desire to stop sinning. Let me give you 3 of the most helpful reasons he offers: *Reason #1, Because a little sin leads to more sin; Reason #3, Because the time spent in sin is forever wasted; and Reason #24, Because the inhabitants of heaven and hell would all testify to the foolishness of this sin.*

CONCLUSION

Just to provide one additional incentive to take this message to heart, Jim Elliff's *Reason #15* is *Because repenting of my sin is such a painful process, yet I must repent.* He's right. Repentance is painful, but we must live the life of repentance. Else, we live as those who *have no knowledge of God* and this would be to our *shame* (v34). We cannot believe in Jesus' resurrection, our future resurrection and be satisfied with *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*. This will never satisfy our souls. We always try more eating, more drinking, more pleasures of various sorts only to end up empty again and again. The only lifestyle that satisfies our souls is one of joyful obedience, even sacrificial obedience. May God give us the grace to live as if we have a true knowledge of God.