

# What If There is No Resurrection Of the Dead?

*"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."*

The Preaching of the Apostle Peter – *Acts 3:14-15*

Some chapters of the Word of God are better known than are other chapters. The fifteenth chapter of *1 Corinthians* is one of those better known chapters. One is not in the kingdom of God, the church, for very long until he knows that this chapter is the "resurrection chapter." Matters pertaining to the doctrine of the resurrection are mentioned in several other places in the New Testament but it is in this chapter that the doctrine is discussed from its first to its last verse. The doctrine of the resurrection is what makes Christianity different from all the other world religions. We are told by those who are ignorant about this matter and who know no better, that Islam is a great religion. It is great as far as some are concerned because its adherents number in excess of one billion people. But lest we forget, the Lord of the New Testament church said *"...wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."*<sup>1</sup> Those who die with the most toys may win in this life but this is not true when it comes to the after life. The majority of people, many of whom had more toys than most of us and who were members of some religious system other than Christianity, will die in a lost state and will spend eternity in hell without any of their toys. If being in the biggest religious group determined one's salvation I would jump from the ol' ship of Zion today and join up with the biggest religious group I could find. But salvation is promised only to those who follow and obey the only begotten Son of God who is Jesus, not Mohammed or Allah. So I will stay in the ship that I am in as it sails ever closer to the New Jerusalem.

There are those who tell us that there is some good in all the religions of the world. I do not agree with that whatsoever. There is nothing good about any religion that would lead a man or woman to think that he or she is alright with God when in fact he or she is not alright with God. It is bad; every whit of it is all bad. That which separates Christianity from all the other world religions is the doctrine of the resurrection – the resurrection of its founder. Only Jesus of Nazareth upon whom Christianity is built has ever resurrected from the dead never to die again. Buddha hasn't. Mohammed hasn't. Confucius hasn't. Wherever they have been buried is where you will find their remains, whatever is left of them. They have not moved one inch since they were "laid to rest" once for all time. But this is not true of Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God.

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<sup>1</sup> *Matthew 7:13*

He is not in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea where He was buried "*but is risen!*"<sup>2</sup> It is His resurrection from the dead that distinguishes Him and His followers and His church from all other religious leaders and their followers and their religious movements. It is His resurrection that makes the gospel the good news that it is. Take away the resurrection and the good news becomes bad news.

**I**n the opening four verses of *I Corinthians 15* the Apostle Paul has this to say: "*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*" The resurrection, according to Paul, is a vital part of the gospel message. But there were some in the church of Christ in Corinth who did not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. This provoked Paul to ask in *verse 12*, "*...how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" That would have provoked me too. I know those who believe in faith, repentance, and confession but not in baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins provoke me every time I hear them espouse such foolishness. These Corinthians believed in the resurrection of Christ but they did not believe in the resurrection of anyone else. If what they believed were true, there were and there are several serious consequences with which to deal. And Paul deals with each one of them.

**T**he first consequence of a "no-resurrection-from-the-dead" doctrine is stated in *verse 13*, "*...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*" This unthinkable and untenable consequence is so serious that Paul repeats it in the sixteenth verse. If no one will be resurrected then neither was Christ. He was made of flesh and bones like all other men. His bodily animations ceased like all other men's do when they die. He was laid in a tomb like all other men when they die. He ceased to breathe like all other men when they die. His death, except for the manner in which it occurred, was like all other men's death in every respect. If all other men who are made of flesh and bone, who cease to have bodily animations, who cease to breathe, and who are buried after their death do not resurrect then what makes the body of Jesus an exception? It was like all others. In referring to the earthly body of Jesus the Hebrew writer stated in *Hebrews 2:14*, "*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise share in the same...*" Three verses later, *verse 17*, it is written that "*...He had to be made like His brethren...*" If the body of Jesus was not any different from the bodies of all other men, and it wasn't, then "*if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*" Ladies and gentlemen, you take from the Word of God the doctrine of the resurrection of all those who die and you take away the resurrection of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> *Luke 24:6*

**T**he second consequence of a “no-resurrection-of-the-dead” doctrine is that found in *verse 14*. “*And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty...*” If the first “*if*” is true – there being no resurrection of the dead – then the second “*if*” is true also. If the dead do not resurrect then Christ has not resurrected, and if Christ has not resurrected “*then our preaching is empty.*” The specific preaching that Paul had in mind was the preaching of the Apostles. “*Our preaching is empty...*” But the same is true of all those who preach the gospel. “If Christ is not risen, then my preaching is empty and your preacher’s preaching is empty.” Preaching the gospel is pointless and without any purpose if the resurrection of Christ did not really take place. More than that, it is a lie. Much of preaching today is pointless and with no purpose but not because Christ did not resurrect from the tomb. Much of what we hear coming from pulpits whether they be made of wood, transparent plastic, or in the form of a radio or television transmitter is absolutely empty because the truth of the gospel and the terms for obeying it are seldom if ever heard. But the preaching of the gospel is of most emptiness if there was no resurrection of Christ. There is nothing to it.

**T**he third consequence of a “no-resurrection-of-the-dead” doctrine is the second half of *verse 14*. “*...your faith is also empty.*” Not only is the preaching of the preacher “*empty*” if there is no resurrection of Christ but also is the “*faith*” of those who listen to his preaching. Take away the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and Christ’s resurrection and the preaching of the gospel is “*empty*,” and building or establishing your “*faith*” upon it is also “*empty*.” As we said earlier, it is the resurrection of Christ that distinguishes Him from all others. But if there was no resurrection of Christ there is no reason whatsoever to believe in Him. A faith in Him without His resurrection is an “*empty*” faith. More than once He said He would rise from the dead. In *Matthew 16:21* it is written that “*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*” In *John 2:19* Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” In *John 2:21* John tells us that when He made that prophetic statement, “*...He was speaking of the temple of His body.*” “*Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*”<sup>3</sup>

**I**f Jesus did not resurrect then He is not the Messiah, He is not the Son of God, and He is nothing more than a liar. And if that is what He really is our faith in Him is a faith in a dead man rather than a resurrected Savior. And if our faith is in a dead man then our faith in His Word, in His church, and in our own resurrection is nothing but a hoax and is “*empty*.” If the preaching of the resurrection is “*empty*” then believing in the preaching of it is also “*empty*.” The truthfulness of gospel preaching stands or falls with the truthfulness of the resurrection and so does one’s faith. Everything about Christianity stands or falls with the doctrine of the resurrection.

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<sup>3</sup> *John 2:22*

**T**he fourth consequence of a “no-resurrection-of-the-dead” doctrine is that articulated by Paul in *1 Corinthians 15:15*. “*Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise.*” Earlier in this same chapter Paul had written that “*all the Apostles,*” including himself, had seen the resurrected Christ. If this were not really true then he and those who said they had seen Him were “*false witnesses,*” liars. Those who preached the resurrection of Christ were liars; and, all the Apostles preached that message. Not only were the Apostles liars but also were the Old Testament prophets who said that God had told them that He would raise up Christ. King David was a liar when, as quoted in *Acts 2*, he prophesied concerning Christ, “*For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*”<sup>4</sup> Peter said what David spoke concerned “*the resurrection of the Christ.*”<sup>5</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen then the preaching of it is “*empty.*” If the preaching of it is “*empty*” then one’s faith in it and Him is “*empty.*” And if there is no resurrection then the Apostles and all others who spoke on the subject are nothing more than “*false witnesses.*”

**L**adies and gentlemen, if the Apostles are nothing more than “*false witnesses*” we may as well close our Bibles, lay them on a book shelf never to be opened again, and go back into the world. There is no reason to believe anything else the Apostles have ever written if they have preached and taught a lie about the resurrection of Christ. Why believe anything the Apostles have said about the Word of God, the church, salvation, heaven, hell, sin, holy living, or any other doctrine in the Word if they have lied to us about the resurrection of Christ? Why believe Peter’s statement, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*”<sup>6</sup> if he lied about the resurrection? Why believe Paul’s warning, “*...if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed?*”<sup>7</sup> If there is no resurrection the Apostles are liars and what they have written are lies. And since all they have written is found in the Bible that book is nothing but a book of lies. You see, ladies and gentlemen, the whole house of cards is built on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The house stands or falls on the resurrection of the dead. If there be no resurrection of the dead the whole house falls.

**T**he fifth consequence of the “no-resurrection-of-the-dead” doctrine is “*...your faith is futile.*” It would appear that this is a reiteration of the same statement made in *verse 14* where Paul said “*...your faith is also empty.*” But here he says “*...your faith is futile.*” The word for “*futile*” is a different word than that used for “*empty.*” Another word for “*futile*” that could be used is “*worthless.*” “*...your faith is [worthless].*” It is as if a man went out and labored all day tilling a field, preparing it for a crop, planting seed but when the time comes to reap the fruit, the field is no different than what it was before all the labor had been expended to produce a crop. It was all useless. It was all

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<sup>4</sup> *Acts 2:27*

<sup>5</sup> *Acts 2:31*

<sup>6</sup> *Acts 2:38*

<sup>7</sup> *Galatians 1:9*

for nothing. It didn't get you anything or anywhere. The faith that one places in Christ and His resurrection is supposed to culminate in our receiving something, namely, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, our faith is *"futile,"* worthless. It will get us nothing.

**O**n the heels of this fifth consequence is the sixth consequence of the "no-resurrection-of-the-dead" doctrine. If there is no resurrection of the dead then *"...you are still in your sins!"* If there is no resurrection of the dead then Paul lied to these Corinthians in *I Corinthians 6:11* when he told them that they had been *"washed...sanctified...justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."* A dead man is not able to do this for anyone. If there is no resurrection of the dead then *"Christ is not risen," "our preaching is empty," "our faith is...empty,"* the Apostles are false witnesses, and our *"faith is futile."* All of this leads to the conclusion that we are still in our sins. If Christ was a false Messiah and if the Apostles repeated the false claims of the false Messiah no one is saved because there is no forgiving power in the blood of a false Messiah. If Jesus died and remains dead He didn't save Himself let alone us. If the dead do not resurrect then Jesus did not resurrect; if Jesus did not resurrect then we have no redemption, no justification, no reconciliation with God, and no forgiveness of sins. And if we have no forgiveness of sins we have no salvation and are just as lost as those who have never believed in Christ but who have always lived their lives in total rebellion to that which we thought all this time was true. A dead, un-resurrected Messiah is not a Messiah of anything or anyone.

**T**he seventh consequence of a "no-resurrection-of-the-dead" doctrine is that stated in *verse 18. "Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."* It is a disturbing thought to think that all the thousands and millions of people who have placed their faith in Christ manifested by their obedience to Him by believing in Him and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins did so in vain, for nothing. But that is what they did if there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul had just written that *"if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"* Those who die while still in their sins die lost – spiritually lost. In spite of their faith in Christ they will go to the same devil's hell as the worst unbelieving reprobate. They will suffer the same eternal consequences of their unforgiven sin as the most hedonistic pagan who never believed in Christ at all. The hope of heaven where every tear will be wiped away from every eye, where *"there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying...no more pain"* is but a false illusion if there is no resurrection of the dead. What an ungodly hoax Christianity is if there is no resurrection of the dead! We can only "Amen!" what Paul said in *verse 32. "If the dead do not rise 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'"*

**T**he eighth consequence of a "no-resurrection-of-the-dead" doctrine is that of *I Corinthians 15:19. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."* If it is true that *"those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished"* then it is *"in this life only we have hope in Christ."* And if that is true, then *"of all men [we are] the most pitiable."* Whether the *"we"* refers to the Apostles or the *"we"* refers

to every Christian who has ever lived, the same is true: *"we are of all men the most pitiable."* When we consider the cross we have carried, the hope we have hidden in our hearts, the struggle we have fought between our spirit and our flesh, the serving and giving we have done, the criticisms and ridicule we have received only to realize that beyond the grave we have no *"hope"* we who are Christians are indeed to be pitied. To repeat Paul, our faith has been *"empty"* and our faith has been *"futile"* and we are to be pitied. That which we call the hall of faith in *Hebrews 11* is really the hall of fools if there is no resurrection of the dead.

**I** *Corinthians 15:12 – 19* is like a set of eight dominoes. If the first one falls so do the other seven. On the other hand if the first one remains standing – and it has for more than two millennia – so do the other seven. Because there is a resurrection of the dead, Christ has resurrected. Because Christ has resurrected our preaching is not *"empty."* Because our preaching is not *"empty,"* our faith is not *"empty."* Our faith is not *"empty"* because the Apostolic witness of God was not false but true. Because our faith is not *"futile"* we are no longer in our sins. Because Christians who fall asleep in Jesus are no longer in their sins they have not perished but are alive and saved. And because of that, we have *"hope"* in Christ not only in this life but beyond this life, through the cemetery, and all the way into the presence of God Almighty. We are not to be pitied. We are to be heard and heeded by those who live their lives outside of Christ and who are destined for eternal hell. Our lives, our faith, our examples are to be emulated, not scorned, rejected and ridiculed.

**B**ecause of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead we are unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ and would to God that others would follow us beyond the here and now to the there and then. But no one will go there with us without dying to sin, being buried with Christ and resurrecting in His likeness in this world as Paul said in *Romans 6:4 – 10*. *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing 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. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him."* Because of the promise of *Romans 6:4 – 10* we unashamedly, and without any equivocation or apology, urge those who long for more than this life has to offer to obey the same gospel terms of salvation we obeyed. *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."* Not until you do that will you be ready for the great day of the resurrection.

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**Acts 2:36** *"Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

**Acts 2:37** *"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"*

**Acts 2:38** *"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*