



## I Corinthians 15

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?*

30 *And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?*

31 *I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

32 *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."*

33 *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*

34 *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

## Intro.

1. This message is part of a series based upon Paul's discussion of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15. Up to this point in the chapter he has sought to defend the truth of the resurrection — mainly that it really happened, and how necessary the resurrection is for salvation.

Now, in today's passage he testifies to his *personal conviction* that Christ really did rise from the dead and how that fact has had a huge impact upon his life. Paul's basic message is that belief in the resurrection changes the way you live because it transforms the way you think about life — about the length of life, about the meaning of life, and especially how you live if you know yourself to possess eternal life.

2. But before we get into that we have to take a quick look at verse 29, one of a handful of verses in the Bible that seem to defy simple explanation. And, of course, even within the Christian world there is a kind of pseudo-scholar that delights in any opportunity to over-complicate things. The commentaries tell us of over 30 different interpretations.

## Look at this verse.

I Corinthians 15:29 *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?*

As you can see for yourself, most translations read as though Paul is making a casual reference to a practice that horrifies orthodox Christians, the idea that people might have themselves baptized to procure salvation for dead people — friends, relatives, historical personages, or some combination of the above.

Brethren, it just ain't so. This is the only verse that even appears to give a hint at such a thing, and everything else in the Bible cries out against it. Not only that, the few cults that have practised such things through the years have been rightly called heretics.

What we have here is one of those cases where the individual words mean one thing, while the meaning that Paul actually had in mind is something else again. Paul is using what today we call an idiomatic expression, and such expressions can be confusing in any language.

Here's an English example: *"Let me put in my two cents."* (Means *"give my opinion,"* has nothing to do with money)

Here's another one: *"A little bird told me."* (Birds cannot talk. This means someone has secretly passed on information)

Something similar was happening when Paul wrote this verse. Here's a translation that gets at the heart of Paul's actual meaning. Remember, he's been defending the resurrection against those who say men don't rise from the dead.

I Corinthians 15:29 However, people are baptized because the dead will come back to life. What will they do? If the dead can't come back to life, why do people get baptized as if they can come back to life? (God's Word translation, published by God's Word to the Nations mission society)

Do you get Paul's meaning now? Paul is saying to those who deny the resurrection, *"Don't you see that to deny the resurrection is to tear the meaning right out of baptism? Why do you think Christians are baptized? It is to show their union with Christ in His death, in His burial, and in His resurrection. Baptism reminds us that to deny the resurrection is to deny the very heart of our faith."*

3. I need to say two more things about this verse before we move on.
  - a. Our union with Christ is the central idea of New Testament baptism, taught explicitly in Romans 6:3ff; I Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:12ff; Galatians 3:27; I Peter 3:21, and hinted at in Matthew 3:15.
  - b. In a passage where Paul has already been speaking about our union with Adam and our mystical union with Christ, a reference to baptism as the sign of that union is absolutely appropriate.
- I. In baptism Paul knew his life had been incorporated into Christ's eternal life, and that made all the difference. From that point onward he began to take the long view of things.
  - A. Paul used his own life to teach that the man who is alive in Christ has immediately moved to a new plane of existence.
    1. He isn't afraid to risk physical danger. V.30, 32 (ship wrecks, stonings, beatings, murder plots, in the arena, etc.)
    2. He no longer fears that he may miss out on some of life's pleasures. V.31
      - a. He is dead to the pleasures of sin; dead to the pleasures of wealth; dead to the allure of fame, authority or popularity; every day he died to all these things, and many more.
      - b. Such a man is moved by higher things, eternal things. V. 31b Instead of

taking pride in earthly success he rejoices over souls saved and disciples made, churches planted, every victory over indwelling sin, every way in which the Kingdom of God is advanced.

B. Such a man is unafraid to confront anyone who tempts people to stop preparing for eternity. V.32b-34

1. If there is no resurrection (as some were saying) we may as well live for the pleasures of the moment. (Eat, drink and be merry)
2. People who talk like this are bad company (in the sense of evil) and will corrupt any who listen to them.
3. Instead, we need to awaken to the reality of the resurrection and stop sinning.
4. To be so ignorant of God, His character and His ways, is shameful, and ought to lead to repentance.

I love the way Eugene Peterson puts all this in *The Message*.

I Corinthians 15:30-33, *"And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work? I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I'd do this if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus? Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn't be the end of me? Not on your life! It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there's no resurrection, "We eat, we drink, the next day we die," and that's all there is to it. But don't fool yourselves. Don't let yourselves be poisoned by this anti-resurrection loose talk. "Bad company ruins good manners." (The Message)*

Now let's apply this to our lives.

II. Each life is different. We don't face the same things Paul faced, nor is our call the same. Here are principles we can draw from this passage to help us know how to take the long view of life. The person who takes the long view of life . . .

A. Knows for certain that heaven is his final destiny! This life has value in the same way that a road has value. It becomes the means to your desired end — heaven, seeing God's face, accepting his reward for our labours, knowing Him as today He knows us!

1. Understands that heaven makes all sacrifice more than worthwhile (Romans 8:18)
2. Do you know for certain that you are going to heaven? Taeko did! (A new convert who only died about three months ago) Jesus came to her and she was never again afraid!
3. Such a person can endure anything, face anything, knowing that none of it is final, that the very worst things (in this world), can be a short cut to your

desired destination.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliott

- B. Has an over-arching purpose, a reason to live that inspires, motivates, challenges, comforts and eventually consumes him.
  - 1. Paul's testimony to King Agrippa was that he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).
    - a. Paul's vision was clear, a message from God that he could put into words.
    - b. I challenge you to write down your vision of who God wants you to be and what God wants you to do.
  - 2. The person who knows himself to be alive forever in Christ has already been given a vision (in part).
    - a. All are called to pursue holiness, to battle to the death against the flesh.
    - b. All are called to serve according to opportunities, natural talents and spiritual gifts.
    - c. All are called to minister to the saints.
    - d. All are called to bear testimony of God's saving grace in Christ

*"So many missionaries, intent on doing something, forget that [God's] main work is to make something of them..."* Jim Elliot

C. Builds broad and strong foundations for life and ministry

- 1. He prepares.
  - a. Makes certain he knows the Scriptures
  - b. Avails himself of appropriate education and/or training opportunities.
  - c. Seeks experience in life serving with others, trying various ways of serving until he finds, either by affirmation or by vision what God would have him do.
- 2. He counts the cost in order to be able to make the full sacrifice.
  - a. There are things he will willingly lay aside.
  - b. There are things he will embrace, and practice until he gets them right.

- c. He will ask himself, not if he is willing to make the journey of a lifetime of obedience, but if he is willing to take the next step as God has revealed it.

*"One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime."* Jim Elliot

- 3. He commits with full knowledge of what commitment means.
- D. Has an outward focus.
  - 1. God's will
  - 2. God's glory
  - 3. God's service
  - 4. God's Kingdom/Christ's church
- E. Understands the balance between serving God and strengthening one's self for further service.
  - 1. Works and rests
  - 2. Prays and plays
  - 3. Engages the multitudes, withdraws for contemplation and reflection
  - 4. Rejoices and weeps
  - 5. Remember, the long view includes the thought that it doesn't all have to be done right now. God has been at work for these past six or seven thousand years, and his work will get done. In the meanwhile, the long view teaches us that we will get more real work done when our spiritual batteries are renewed and recharged, not to mention when we have given much thought to our ministry.
- F. Will not hesitate to make the ultimate sacrifice.
  - 1. Willingly offers the sacrifice of daily service, of a disciplined life. (Living sacrifices, Romans 12:1,2)
  - 2. Is open to the possibility that sacrifice may involve some kind of death, either death in the classic sense, or a kind of living death (to reputation, to opportunities for advancement, to the things we thought we wanted most, etc.)
  - 3. Understands all sacrifice will be repaid a million times over.

*"I may no longer depend on pleasant impulses to bring me before the Lord. I must*

*rather respond to principles I know to be right, whether I feel them to be enjoyable or not."* Jim Elliot

G. Avoids entangling alliances

1. Anything that will distract him or prevent him from finishing the course God has set.
2. Anything that will weaken his conviction that serving Christ is not just the most important thing we do, in the end it is the only thing that matters.

*"We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power the Twentieth Century does not reckon with. But we are "harmless," and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle-to-the-death with principalities and powers in high places. Meekness must be had for contact with men, but brass, outspoken boldness is required to take part in the comradeship of the Cross. We are "sideliners" — coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world cannot hate us, we are too much like its own. Oh that God would make us dangerous!"*  
Jim Elliot

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