

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What Resurrection Means for You

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

Code: 90-495

We are returning to the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians on this evening and to a very interesting, brief portion of this chapter that I think you'll find very practical and very helpful. In working our way through this lengthy chapter all the way to verse 58, we have come just about to the middle of the chapter with verse 29, and want to read you verses 29 to 34 as the setting for the Word of God to us tonight.

“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.” That is a fascinating, fascinating little section, a number of questions, and a very serious warning and indictment.

Just exactly what is going on here? For 28 verses, since the beginning of this chapter, we've been learning about resurrection, that we're all going to be raised in glorified bodies, all believers. All people who die will be raised. But this is about believers, and all of us will be raised in glorified bodies. We will be gathered into heaven in our final glorified form, eternal spirits, eternal souls, but with eternal bodies fit for heaven. This is the plan of God. This is what God is working out in redemptive history, and someday it'll all come to its culmination. And that's what we saw in verses 26 to 28, when everybody is finally gathered into heaven in that final form in our resurrection bodies, we are all gathered in Christ, and Christ gives Himself and all of us to the Father so that God may be all in all.

That's a kind of culminating moment in the middle of this chapter, and it's been clearly indicating to us that there is a real resurrection. We will rise. And what that says is we will be who we are in the life to come. We aren't going to buy into the philosophies of the Greeks, as Paul addresses them here, that we all sort of fade into the eternal being, we all kind of disappear and dissolve into the ultimate deity. We will be who we are forever. We will be ourselves forever. God has a plan for us, not in some blurred mass, but as individual persons. We will all rise in glorified bodies to be forever who we are; that is clear throughout the Scripture.

Now this has some serious implications – the fact that you will be you forever in heaven, that I will be me forever in heaven, in a perfected form, both soul and body; that has some very serious implications. Those implications can be seen in this text. But sort of coming up to the text, I would just remind you that this was the confidence of the saints throughout the Scripture. Job who suffered so greatly, endured that suffering, never had his faith disappear. He even said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” But he said this: “I know that in my flesh I will see God.” We know that.

We know that when Jesus appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, He appeared there with Moses and Elijah who were Moses and Elijah. We know that Jesus said, "I am the God of Abraham and Isaac." It was a declaration by God about those men after they had died physically; but God was still their God because they were still alive in His presence. It is nothing short of that resurrection reality, that resurrection hope and confidence that caused Stephen, for example, to offer himself, as it were, under the bloody stones and die as a martyr, realizing that he would in his own person in glorified form enter immediately into the presence of the Lord. It was that confidence that caused Paul to say, "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Far better to depart and be with Christ.

It was nothing less than that resurrection hope that must have allowed Andrew to confidently be martyred by being tied to a cross and left for days to die, or Peter being crucified upside-down, or James being beheaded. Nothing but resurrection hope could have caused the apostle Paul to lay his head on a block and have it severed from his body in the confidence that that was not the end of him, that was really the beginning, a perfect and eternal apostle. This is precisely Paul's point here.

Now religion promises life after death. As you well know, if you're tracking with the terrorists today, they are living in the delusion that if they kill infidels, and if they in the process of killing infidels take their own life, they're going to end up with seventy-two virgins in some special place in heaven where all the virgins will be waiting for them on green pillows to satisfy them forever. A lie right out of hell, by the way, but a lie for which many give their lives.

The truth is only in Christ will you rise to heavenly glory, and it will be nothing base; it will be Christlikeness, and the very righteousness which He possesses will belong to us. We live our lives in anticipation of resurrection. We know that we are promised rewards, personal rewards. We know that there is an inheritance waiting for us, waiting for you, waiting for me. We know there is a crown of life, a crown of righteousness, a crown of rejoicing, that'll be granted to us personally. This reality of our eternal personhood in glorified form, spirit and body, is essential to the Christian faith.

Now Paul looks at that reality in the verses that I read to you, and we find that he sees this as an incentive on three levels, an incentive – a compelling incentive on three levels. It's a very fascinating portion of Scripture. Let me help you to see what those levels are.

First of all, I think Paul is saying here that the fact that we will be who we are in glorified forms, we will be eternally ourselves but in perfected reality in heaven, both soul and body, is a motivation to salvation. That's the first point that I want you to see; it's a motivation to salvation. Now you might be struggling to see that, but let me just help you with verse 29, one of the most difficult verses in all of Scripture. And I confess at this point that I cannot be absolutely dogmatic; I can't even be dogmatic. But I can give you what I think is the best and simplest understanding of this verse, verse 29, as if to say, "If there is no resurrection," – which He's been affirming for the first 28 verses – "if there's no resurrection, without the resurrection what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for the dead?" What in the world is this talking about? What is the baptism for the dead? If you have been confused by that welcome to the club.

I remember a friend of mine who did a dissertation in graduate school on the views of that verse, and he covered forty of them; there may be a hundred. This particular verse has been, for many people, a kind of maze. But I want to give you what I think is the best and simplest way that I can understand what the apostle Paul is saying; and I don't think he's trying to be obscure or oblique. As always, I think he's trying to give us something that is very practical. But let me back up from the truth and let

you know about some of the error; I don't want to give you too much of it. But a very familiar cult is Mormonism.

The Mormons teach vicarious baptism, and they say they find it in this verse, that we need – they say as Mormons – not only be baptized for ourselves, but to be baptized vicariously for people who are already dead. That is Mormon theology. Mormon leaders teach that the spirits of those who have died are suspended somewhere and do not enter heaven until another Mormon is baptized for them by proxy, which then gets them out of wherever they are into heaven. This was also a view of some early heretics Sarenth and Marcion, who – Marcion was kind of an ancient gnostic. He had lots of heresy. He believed Jesus was a spirit without a body. But he also believed in a proxy baptism for someone who was dead. This view claims that Paul is teaching that a Christian who has been baptized allows himself to be baptized again, and maybe again and again and again for persons who have died without baptism – and that would be categorically unsaved people who can't get into heaven, so that the baptism of that believer by proxy is credited to the dead person, and the dead person then has access to heaven.

Now, obviously, Scripture doesn't teach that. In fact, your own baptism didn't save you. And there can't be a baptism of you that saves somebody else; your baptism didn't save you. There's no such thing as being saved by any baptism, whether for you or for someone else. There's no such thing as vicarious salvation. This is the grave error of infant baptism, the idea that the child is baptized in complete ignorance of the gospel, but is placed into the covenant in some kind of secure place where some say you can even presume regeneration on the proxy faith of the parents who brought the baby to be baptized. That's a salvation, again, by proxy, by someone else. Baptism doesn't save anyone anytime ever – not babies and not adults. And baptism certainly doesn't save dead unbelievers.

But what is he talking about here? Well let's look at it a little more closely. He recognizes that there are people being baptized with some reference to dead people. What could that possibly mean? Well let's start and take it apart.

He says, "What will those do who are baptized?" Stop right there. He's got to be talking about Christian baptism, Christian baptism: the act of proclaiming one's union with Christ done in response to saving faith, the believer who has put his trust in Christ goes through an immersion as the symbol of His death, burial and resurrection in Christ. This is so synonymous with Christianity that baptism actually became a synonym for salvation.

In the Great Commission at the end of the gospel of Matthew our Lord says this: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." That is the evangelistic effort. It assumes faith in Christ. Baptism was so inseparable from saving faith that it is spoken of in its place.

The same thing happens in Ephesians 4 where you have the statement: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," and that baptism is the water baptism that was so connected, so universally connected in the early church, with saving faith, that it is spoken of as if it were the very saving faith itself. So we're talking about Christian baptism here, the baptism of believers.

And what does it mean that believers are baptized for the dead? Well we know what dead means.

What about for the dead? Let me help you with that. The preposition here translated “for” in your English Bible is *huper* from which we get “hyper” in English. But it’s *huper*. It can be translated many, many ways. It is a very, very flexible preposition. It can mean over, above, across, beyond. It can mean instead of, in the name of – which is what the Mormons take it to mean. It can mean in behalf of. Or, it can have causal meaning, and it can mean because of, because of. If we take that very normal meaning for the word, we would read it this way: “What will those do who are baptized because of the dead?”

What does that mean, being baptized because of the dead? Why would anybody be baptized because of a dead person? Well we know that baptism is connected to salvation, so some people have been saved and baptized because of people who are dead. That’s not too far away, is it? There are plenty of people who came to faith in Christ by reading something written by someone who is dead, or by recalling a testimony given by someone who is now dead – a parent, a friend – or even by the influence of the testimony of someone dying who is now dead.

Baptism refers to salvation. Some people are being saved and baptized, coming to salvation, entering the family of God, the body of Christ, because of the influence of believers who are dead. That could mean three things. That could mean, Number One, because of the testimony of believers who’ve gone before; the testimony of believers that we know who face death, secondly; and, thirdly, because of – and this is a very key one – the promise of a reunion.

Inevitably when you go to the funeral of a believer, the folks are going to say that we will all be united together again. When someone loses a child or someone loses a spouse or someone loses a very good friend, a loved one who is a believer, we have the hope of reunion; that’s always brought out at a memorial service. The hope of the resurrection and the reunion that follows resurrection is an incentive to salvation. It would make sense then to read this verse that there are those who are baptized, they come to faith in Christ and go through Christian baptism because of the influence of dead people whose testimony they heard and read and now they’re gone, or because of being there and watching how people face death and how they died, or thirdly, because of the hope of reunion with those people who are dead. A good place to see this kind of unfold is in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

Let me invite you to go to the 11th chapter of Hebrews. This is a chapter that essentially does exactly what I’ve just said. The writer of Hebrews is wanting us to have faith, faith in the gospel. All through Hebrews he’s saying, “Don’t shrink back. Don’t fall way. Don’t turn away. Come all the way to truth. Come all the way to the gospel. Come all the way to Christ.” Verse 39, which ends chapter 10, says, “We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but those who have faith for the preserving of the soul.” Move forward in saving faith.

And then in order to provide impetus for that, or motivation, he launches into chapter 11, and chapter 11 is full of a whole lot of dead people, a whole lot of dead people whose testimony is a motive to faith in Christ, faith in God. Verse 4 he talks about Abel, talks about Enoch, talks about Noah. Verse 8 he’s into Abraham; verse 11, Sarah. Verse 13 sums it up: “They all died in faith. They all died in faith.” A testimony to their faith in the face of death is record in the Old Testament.

And then he comes to Isaac and Jacob, Joseph, and Moses in verse 23. Then he comes down to Rahab the harlot in verse 30, and then in verse 32 it’s “Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained

promises, shut the mouths of lions, quench the power of fire, escape the edge of the sword, from weakness we're made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection."

These people are dead, they're all dead. They all lived a life of faith looking for a resurrection. They experienced mockings and scourgings, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death at the sword. They went about in sheepskin, goatskin, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. Why did they do this? They did this all the way to death, because they knew there was a better resurrection. They are examples of a life of faith. They are the dead who give us a picture of the life of faith.

In chapter 12, verse 22, of Hebrews says, "You have come to Mount Zion" – when you've come to Christ – "you've come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." He says, "When you come to Christ, you have come into the communion of the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. You will be gathered one day to the righteous who are now made perfect in heaven, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant."

The beginning of chapter 12 he says, "Even Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." How Jesus faced death is how many saints faced death, looking for a better life, an afterlife, resurrection life.

Paul's point is this: "If the dead don't rise, then what's the point of all these testimonies? What is the point of looking at saints who have gone on and left us their testimony, or having seen how they died in faith even when they were sawn in half, or had their heads cut off, or were killed in some other way." Paul's point is, "If the dead don't rise, if these people just go out of existence and blend into the amorphous fog of some impersonal deity, then what is the point of the reunion promises?" Reunion is a strong, strong incentive to salvation.

So many times I have spoken about that memorial services and funerals, and reminded family members and friends that they could meet again in the presence of Christ. There's hope for a reunion. There's hope for those who are part of the general assembly, the firstborn, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and those that are raised together at the coming of Christ, to be gathered around the throne again. If there's no resurrection, if there's no reunion, if we don't go there to meet the people we know and love, and who have gone before us and given us the testimony of a life of faith, what's the point, what's the point?

Even David, back in 2 Samuel 12, when the little baby conceived in his sin by Bathsheba died, you remember David's reaction. David was sorrowful, sad, weeping, crying over the death of this baby, until the baby died. And when the baby died, David washed his face, cleaned up, wiped away his tears and said, "I will go to him. I will go to him." He's not talking about being buried in the same cemetery, he's talking about a reunion: "I will go to him."

When his adult son Absalom, who basically fomented a rebellion against him, when he died getting his hair caught in a tree and being slaughtered, David couldn't be consoled. It was impossible to console him, because he knew he'd never see him again, never. When we go to heaven, we will be who we are.

Paul says in writing to the Thessalonians, "Who is our hope or hope or joy or crown of exaltation? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming. You are our glory and joy." Paul says, "You know what the attraction of heaven is, it's you, it's you Thessalonians. You're the crown of joy. You're the hope."

In the 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians, in verse 13, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep," – or have died – "that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." We're all going to meet together again. This is reunion.

This has always been an incentive for people to come to Christ. The testimony of those who have died in the past and left their testimonies with us, how many people have been saved reading the testimony of a great preacher who is long gone, testimony of a great missionary who is long gone, maybe a letter from someone who had died? How many have come to Christ by watching someone die and seeing their faith in the face of death? How many have come to Christ incentivized by the hope of reunion?

In the 7th chapter of Acts I think we might be able to assume that something like this was taking place while Stephen was being stoned. The end of the sermon that Stephen preached recorded in the book of Acts the people were cut to the quick by what he said, and he had declared Christ to be the Messiah, and the people to be the betrayers and murderers of their own Messiah.

"And when they heard it" – verse 54 – "they were cut to the quick. They began gnashing their teeth at him. Being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' They cried out with a loud voice, covered their ears, rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep." Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

Hmm, I just wonder, I just wonder if later on when Saul, on the road to Damascus, was confronted by Jesus, he wasn't struck again by the unforgettable moment and the dying, hopeful, confident, triumphant words of Stephen that he had heard some years before. He would be able to meet Stephen in whose death he participated. But if the dead don't rise, there's no reunion, the grave is the end, there's no hope, there's nothing. So you see if we deny resurrection, we lose this great salvation incentive.

There's a second incentive here that I think the apostle Paul lays out for us about which there is really no doubt. It's in verses 30 to 32: "Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by

the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

"What is the point of serving the Lord? What is the point of Sacrifice? Why am I doing this? Why am I living my entire life in danger every hour? What is the purpose of dying every day? Why am I fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus? Why don't I just eat and drink and die?" If there's no resurrection, there's no motive for service, or sacrificial enduring suffering service.

And Paul served in the boldest way. He even identified himself as a soldier, as a warrior, as a boxer, as a wrestler, as a runner. Paul and the other apostles basically lived in peril their entire life. At any hour, a blow of persecution could strike them down, and did eventually. "Why am I living like this? Why am I risking my life? Why am I in danger every moment from the very moment of my conversion when I was immediately viewed by the Jews as a traitor? Why did I have to be let down over the wall to escape the plotting of the Jews way back in Damascus at the very beginning of my Christian life? Why was I sent to Tarsus by the Jerusalem disciples, because the Greeks were seeking to kill me way back at the beginning? Why have I endured all the things that are listed in the letter to the Corinthians, the second letter to the Corinthians?

"Why do I have to be afflicted in every way? Why do I have to be persecuted, struck down? Why am I always caring about in the body the dying of Jesus. Why is this necessary? Why is death working in me all the time? Why do I need to be in prison? Why am I being falsely accused? Why am I being shipwrecked, spending night and day in the ocean? Why have I been beaten with rods so many times and whipped by the Jews? Why?

Verse 31: "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." That's not some mystical, spiritual thing. Literally he said, "I expect every day to die, to actually die."

When he says, "I affirm," this is a Greek particle that introduces an oath. He is literally giving an oath: "I'm giving you an oath, and I have a right to declare this. I die every day. Why am I doing this? So that I can boast in your faith if we don't rise." It isn't that he's proud of himself; it is that he is grateful for the work the Lord has done.

The phrase, "I die daily," or the statement, "I die daily," is very, very strong. He's really saying, "I swear that every day, for your sakes, I stand at death's door. Why in the world am I doing this if there's no resurrection? What's the point of putting my life on the line? It makes no sense."

And he even refers to one particular incident in verse 32: "If from human motives I fought" – or, literally, humanly speaking – "I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus. What does it profit me?"

What's he talking about here? We don't really have anything in the book of Acts or in the record of Paul's life that indicates that he was thrown into an arena with wild beasts at Ephesus. But in the 19th chapter of the book of Acts, we do read this in verse 23. When he was in Ephesus, "There was no small disturbance. A man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis," – the god or goddess of the Ephesians – "was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that our prosperity depends on this business. You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this

Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people saying that gods made with hands are not gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of our fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless, and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.'

"When they heard this they were filled with rage. They began crying out, saying, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' The city was filled with confusion. They rushed with one accord into the theater," – where Paul was – "dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him."

You know the story of his escape. Is that what he's referring to? Is it that sort of metaphoric wild beasts, or was there some other time when he actually was thrown into an arena with wild beasts? Could be either. There's no reason to necessarily assign this to the incident I read in Acts 19. It may well be that he was actually thrown into an arena with wild animals much like Daniel. There are legends about that.

There is a legend that – and maybe it's borrowed from Daniel – that Paul was put in an arena with wild beasts, and the wild beasts treated him the same way the lions treated Daniel; they just sat there and never attacked. The word used here is the kind of description that we see connected to the gladiators who fought the lions in the arena. We don't know. Whatever it is, Paul says, "Why am I doing this? Why am I living every day on the edge? Humanly speaking, this doesn't profit me. What's the point of this? Why am I bearing in my body the marks of Christ?" Galatians 6:17.

"If the dead are not raised, come on, let's just eat and drink for tomorrow; we die. Let's just be hedonists." That language, by the way, is directly quoted from Isaiah 22:13, where it is an expression of the hedonism of apostate Israel. Apostate Israel was so hedonistic in Isaiah's day that they basically lived out this: "Eat, drink, tomorrow we die."

What kind of hedonistic godlessness? "Hey, if there's no resurrection, if I don't exist in the future, then why am I doing this? Why? Why am I hoping for a reunion with the noblest and best of all humanity, those that have come to know the true God and live for Him? Why am I giving my life? Why am I sacrificing anything? It's foolish. If there is no resurrection, then let's live like animals."

This is what was, I think, haunting Solomon in the writing of Ecclesiastes. Listen to the words of Ecclesiastes, chapter 2. This is human wisdom, humanly speaking: "There is nothing better for a man" – Ecclesiastes 2:24 – "than to eat and drink and tell himself his labor is good." That's it; eat and drink; that's all there is.

Chapter 3, verse 12: "I know there's nothing better than to rejoice and do good in one's lifetime; and that every man should eat and drink and see the good in his labor." In chapter 5, verse 18, "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, and drink, and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward." That is absolute hedonistic cynicism. "Suck out of this life all you can get; this is all there is."

In the 8th chapter and the 14th verse, we read, "There is futility which, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. So I

commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.” Everything is under the sun; and if all there is is what’s under the sun and you’re just protoplasm waiting to become manure, what’s the point of serving God, sacrificing?

“Go then” – chapter 9 of Ecclesiastes, verse 7 – “eat your bread in happiness, drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life, for this is your reward under the sun.” Jesus told us about a rich fool in Luke 12 who said, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. “ Classical literature is full of this. This infected the Greek world, the Roman world.

Herodotus the Greek historian tells of a custom among the Egyptians. “In social meetings among the rich when the banquet has ended, a servant carries around to several guests a coffin in which there is a wooden image of a corpse carved and painted to resemble a dead person as nearly as possible. The wooden corpse is shown to each guest, and each guest is told, ‘Gaze here, drink and be merry, for when you die, such shall you be.’” But if there is a resurrection then there’s every reason to serve and to receive a full reward.

And as I read you in Hebrews 11, there is a better resurrection. We will rise, 2 Corinthians 5: “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.” Another eternal body, a resurrection body. But if there’s no resurrection, there’s no incentive for a reunion. So if you’re just going to go out of existence it’s pointless. There’s no incentive for service. If this is all there is, you might as well suck up all the pleasure you can.

There’s a third incentive that Paul mentions, not only as an incentive in the resurrection to salvation and service, but to sanctification. This is very important, verses 33 and 34: “Do not be deceived.” And that is a very common warning: Galatians 6:7, “Don’t be deceived; what you sow, you’ll reap.” First Corinthians 6:9, “Don’t be deceived.” James 1, “Don’t be deceived.” It’s a present tense.

It could be read, “Stop. Stop being deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals.” There is so much that I could say about that, but I will not indulge myself on it. Incredibly important statement: “Bad company corrupts good morals.

Now you see the word “company” in English. I don’t know what your version might say, but that is not really the best translation. “Company” is too benign a word. This is a much more profound word. It is the Greek word *homilia*, *homilia*. It’s basic meaning is association, communion. In fact, it is used only here in the entire New Testament, but when it is used in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint in Exodus 21:10, it has reference to marital intercourse. It’s a very significant kind of association. But more than that, it used again in the Old Testament and only those two places: in Proverbs 7:21 – and there it is translated seductive speech. So what it is, it has overtones of seduction and even sexual behavior.

This you must know: bad associations, bad exposure to seductive speech. And in other Greek writing, it refers to a lecture or a lesson, or even a sermon. We could sum it up and say this: “Bad teaching corrupts good morals. Bad theology corrupts good morals. Bad associations corrupts good

morals.”

What kind of associations are we talking about? The answer comes in Psalm 1: “How blessed is the man who doesn’t walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.” You don’t walk in the counsel of the wicked, you don’t listen to their instruction, you don’t stop and stand and connect with sinners, and you don’t sit and be instructed by scoffers. Bad doctrine, bad perceptions, bad information corrupts good morals. And here is some bad information: There is no resurrection. That corrupts good morals.

If you have the hope of Christ welcoming you into His presence, then you’ll understand 1 John 3:3. Verse 2: “We are the children of God now, but it hasn’t yet appeared what we will be. But we know that when He will appear, we will be like Him,” – a person, recognizable – “and we’ll see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” The hope of resurrection reunion with Christ is a purifying hope.

Bad theology, bad instruction, bad teaching, bad belief corrupts good morals. People live their theology, they live their convictions, they live what they believe. Evil companions, evil associations expose you to bad theology, bad doctrine, and that corrupts good morals. So in verse 34, he says, “Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. And I speak this to your shame.” If you’re following these people who are completely ignorant of God and you’re following their bad theology, you should be ashamed of yourself; stop sinning. Wrong doctrine produces evil behavior.

Thucydides tells how when the deadly fatal plague came to Athens, people committed every unimaginable, shameful crime. He says, “They snatched every lustful pleasure, because they believed life was short, and there was no resurrection. They would have to pay no price for their vice.”

The Roman poet Horace wrote this: “Tell them to bring wines and perfumes, and the two short-lived blossoms of the lovely rose while circumstances, and age, and the black threads of the fates still allow us to do so.” The fates indulge.

One of the most famous poets, Latin poets, is Catullus. You can Google him and you’ll find some interesting things. Catullus wrote this: “Let us live, my Lesbia,” – Lesbia was his pseudonym for his lover, to whom he wrote a lot of poems that are still around – “let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love, and let us value the tales of austere old men at a single halfpenny.” In other words, cheap and useless. “Suns can set, and then return again. But, for us, when once our brief light sets, there is but one perpetual night through which we must forever sleep.” Let’s live, let’s love before we go out of existence. Take away the thought of life to come, take away the thought of resurrection, take away the thought of accountability, take away the thought of punishment, take away the thought of reward, and life becomes a hedonistic disaster.

A metaphor for that is simple and visible to all of us. Watch the news; when riots happen in an inner city and the people know that the police can’t stop them, they tear the place down, because they know there will be no consequences. The ultimate consequence, of course, for the unbeliever is hell; the ultimate hope for the believer is heaven. Both of those lay a heavy, heavy claim on how we live our lives. So verse 34, “Become sober-minded, think clearly, live righteously, stop sinning, stop your

shameful conduct.”

Does the resurrection matter? Of course it matters. We're going to live forever. The resurrection of Christ is a reality; and because He lives, we will live. Salvation then can be sought in the hope of resurrection reunion and resurrection life. Service can be given with suffering and even martyrdom, because it will produce an eternal reward in the resurrection. Sanctification should be the goal of our lives here, purity the goal of our lives here, because we will be rewarded eternally in the presence of the Lord. Anything less than this is a shameful deception.

Lord, we thank You again tonight for Your Word; it just so fascinates us with its insights, clarity, power. And, Lord we do understand that this life is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away, and we live forever, we live forever. We who are Yours live forever with You. We pray that You will cause us to live in the light of heaven, anticipating the glorious reunions there with all the saints who've gone before, and including You, our blessed Christ, that we will live lives of sacrificial service knowing that we'll be rewarded in Your presence and able to cast our crowns at Your feet, that we'll live lives of sanctification being purified in the hope of that resurrection which will unite us to You. We want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

We thank You, Lord, for the promise of life that takes all the emptiness and uselessness of living under the sun away, and replaces it with hope for how we live here, how we love here, how we serve here. We'll show up again in our eternal blessing, whereby we will be able to enjoy and glorify You forever and ever. May our hearts be eager to embrace the life that is to come, and may we hold lightly to the things of this world. These things we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

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