

Can I Believe In The Resurrection?
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1 Corinthians 15

A new Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey was recently done asking questions about Americans' belief in Jesus and whether he rose from the grave.

- Question: Thinking of all Americans (not just Christians) what percentage would you think BELIEVE Christ rose from the dead?
- 78% of Americans (overall) share that belief (that Christ rose from the dead).
- just 10% don't believe Christ rose from the dead, and another 11% are not sure.

- Question: What percentage of Evangelical Christians would you guess BELIEVE Christ rose from the dead? What about Catholics? Other Protestants?
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of Evangelical Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead, compared to 87% of Catholics and 86% of other Protestants.

http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/lifestyle/holidays/april_2010/78_think_jesus_christ_rose_from_the_dead

Here's what I would say to the 3% of Evangelical Christians and the 13 to 14% of other religions who are somewhere on a church roll but don't believe in the RESURRECTION: "If I didn't believe in the RESURRECTION, I would have just SLEPT IN this morning!"

What is the point of affiliating with a church and calling yourself a Christian (or even a Catholic) if you don't believe Christ rose from the grave and that BECAUSE He rose...WE will be RESURRECTED?

As I think about these recent lessons on 1 Corinthians, and all the problems Paul had to address in his letter to the church at Corinth, I would conclude that while many things have changed about how life is lived since then...SOME THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH.

Apparently in the church at Corinth some church members were claiming there was no resurrection from the dead. Specifically, they had doubts about BELIEVERS' resurrection. Apparently they didn't doubt that Jesus rose from the dead. They just didn't see that His resurrection guaranteed that God will raise ALL BELIEVERS.

- Question: When you think about being RESURRECTED and the life we'll have in Heaven, what things are you looking forward to?

- What about the new GLORIFIED BODY we're promised in scripture? What are you most looking forward to about having that new body?

Again, if we aren't promised RESURRECTION and ETERNAL LIFE...why not just sleep in today? And if we DO believe in RESURRECTION and ETERNAL LIFE we have something to get up and be glad about!

1 Corinthians 15:1-6

1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter,[b] and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

- Verse 1: What does Paul say he is about to clarify for them? The Gospel
- In verses 1-4 he says, what I'm about to write is FUNDAMENTAL to everything I've taught you and the very BASIS for forming this Church:
- Christ die for our sins
- He was buried
- And He was raised on the third day
- Look at verses 5 and 6: How does he begin to VERIFY the resurrection to them? Historically
- He says Jesus appeared to Cephas (Peter); then to the twelve (by then perhaps Judas had been replaced by Matthias); then He appeared to over 500 "brothers" at one time.

Scholar Ernest Kevan tells us that there is very little dispute about the HISTORICAL authenticity of Paul's letters. And that they were written during the time of his missionary journeys about A.D. 55-58. Only about 25 years after the death of Christ!

Do you think in the time of this letter to the church in Corinth you could find some eye witnesses to this major event that happened 25 years before?

25 years ago next month David Wuth and I both conned our wives into marrying us!

I can promise you that I can easily find some eye witnesses to verify that event.

Paul is saying the same thing about Christ's appearances AFTER He rose from the dead.

Let's move on to verses 12-19:

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

- Paul was such a great DEBATER! Look at his thought process.

- If you believe Christ was raised from the dead, how can you say there will be no resurrection from the dead!
- If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ wasn't resurrected
- And if Chris wasn't raised our preaching is USELESS and SO IS YOUR FAITH
- And it's worse than that: WE'RE ALL LIARS ABOUT GOD
- And it's worse than that: You're FAITH IS FUTILE and you are STILL IN YOUR SINS
- And it's worse than that: Your dear granny that died is lost too!
- Clearly Paul had played the game JENGA! Anybody here ever played the game JENGA?
- Explain how it works. Wooden blocks; in a tower; remove a block and make the tower taller. If you remove the wrong block...GAME OVER.
- Paul is saying this DOUBT you have about whether believers will be resurrected with Christ is like pulling out the wrong block in JENGA...GAME OVER...the whole thing collapse.
- I love how he sums it up in verse 19!
- If our belief in Christ is only for what we have in THIS LIFE...we should be PITIED more than all men!

In other words, if you don't believe Christ was raised and that we'll be raised with Him, you might as well have slept in today!

- Now Paul jumps ahead to the REALLY GOOD NEWS!
- Let's look at verses 50-57:

50I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." [g]

55"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?" [h] 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Ever go to a restaurant where there's a sign over the door: No shoes; no shirt; no service?
- Those signs started at the beach where people might try to just come to eat in swim trunks
- If you've seen some of the guys who hang "out" on the beach with no shirt you know why they don't want them in a restaurant where they want you to KEEP your appetite

- Paul told the Corinthians that Heaven will have a sign: “No flesh and blood allowed!” “No corruptible bodies past this point!”
- Sometimes you go to a FANCY restaurant and if you’re a man what might they require you wear? Jacket and tie
- What if you don’t have one? They lend you one so you can come in.
- Paul said you can’t inherit the Kingdom of God with this messed up, corruptible body
- But, no problem! What are the last few words of verse 51? We will be changed!
- We will be given a NEW, GLORIFIED body for all eternity
- In the Greek world of that day, they didn’t believe the body would be resurrected
- They believed the spirit or soul was TRAPPED in the body and would be freed from the body to exist just as a spirit
- That’s not what the Bible says

Last week we read:

1 Corinthians 13:12 (New International Version)

12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

(Meaning, we will have a GLORIFIED version of our body that can be recognized.)

- What will that GLORIFIED BODY be like?

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20-21 (New International Version)

20But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

1 John 3:2 (New International Version)

2Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears,[a]we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

- We will be LIKE Him
- We will have a GLORIFIED BODY like Jesus had after he was resurrected
- Scripture tells us he was recognized; he ate; he walked and talked;
- It also tells us he could “materialize” suddenly
- The fact is we don’t fully know what it will be like but here is what we DO KNOW:

In 1 Corinthians 2:9 Paul quoted Isaiah 64:4

(New International Version)

9However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived

what God has prepared for those who love him"[a]—

- We don't fully know what our new bodies will be like but we DO know they will be like Christ's body before he ascended and it will be UNIMAGINABLE!

There are some questions about the salvation of Benjamin Franklin, but the words he wrote to be put on his tombstone are appropriate for this lesson:

"The body of Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book its content torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant edition revised and corrected by the author."

Christ himself defended the resurrection:

Matthew 23:23-33

23That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 24"Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. 25Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. 26The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. 27Finally, the woman died. 28Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" 29Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. 30At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 31But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 32'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'[a]? **He is not the God of the dead but of the living.**" (Emphasis mine).

- He is not the God of the dead...but of the living! AMEN!
- Believers should be able to defend the resurrection
- There are many good, solid books on this...I would recommend two:

John Stott's BASIC CHRISTIANITY is a short, concise book that is helpful not only about the resurrection but about just what the title says the BASICS of Christianity. It has a great chapter on the resurrection. <http://www.amazon.com/Basic-Christianity-John-Stott/dp/0802811892>

If you want something more scholarly and deep, THE NEW EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT by Josh McDowell covers the waterfront on defending our faith and has a thorough discussion of whether the resurrection is hoax or history. <http://www.amazon.com/Evidence-Demands-Questions-Challenging-Christians/dp/0785243631>

There's also great information that you can trust on a website created by the North American Mission Board: www.4truth.net I've given you the link in the notes:

http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2903511/k.5644/Jesus_His_Resurrection_Apologetics.htm

John MacArthur writes:

...if we don't believe in bodily resurrection, then we lose some great motivation and some great incentive in the Christian life, don't we?

...we lose an incentive to salvation... if there's no resurrection, there's no hope of reunion then people who come to Christ with the desire to be rejoined with those they love won't bother... resurrection is a great incentive to service. Paul says, "I die daily, my life is in jeopardy every hour. I fight with beasts at Ephesus." Well, why would I do that if there's no resurrection? I just eat and drink and die and forget it. I just fulfill my sensual needs and I wouldn't get involved. And thirdly...if there's no resurrection, we lose a great incentive to sanctification or holiness because the thing that keeps us desirous of obedience is the fact that we must face Christ with a sense of accountability. The resurrection must be true. The hole of the Christian light hinges on this.

<http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/1881>

Now here's the really good news:

I never want to assume that just because this is Sunday School, everyone in the room has made certain they will share in this wonderful RESURRECTION for all eternity. If you're not CERTAIN that you'll INHERIT eternal life, it's as easy as A, B, C.

- Admit that you are a sinner (we all are!). None of us can measure up to God's standard on our own.
- Believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son and ask Him to forgive you from sin. It's a FREE gift from God to you.
- Confess faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord (the boss of your life).

Any of us here this morning would REJOICE in praying with you to be CERTAIN you'll be in that RESURRECTION with a new GLORIFIED BODY for all eternity!

So What's The Takeaway?

- If we don't believe that Jesus was raised and because of that we'll be raised...we might as well sleep in on Sunday mornings!
- If we DO believe that...we'll be a lot more motivated to get up and GO EVERY DAY to tell others about it.
- We don't have to be intimidated by people who want to argue with us about the RESURRECTION. Scripture proves it to those who believe the Bible. And there are materials we've mentioned today that can help us DEFEND our faith to those who don't. We owe it to ourselves to get EQUIPPED.
- Finally, let this lesson make all of us STOP and REJOICE about ETERNAL LIFE and OUR NEW BODIES and that GREAT REUNION we'll have with LOVED ONES who were believers and went before us. And best of all, that we'll see JESUS Himself face to face! That's a promise!