

CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?
EXPLAINING APOSTASY PASSAGES
1 Corinthians 15:1-58

BRIAN

1. Greek Philosophy Rejected the Body's Resurrection
 - a. Greek thinkers, like Plato, saw the body as bad—a prison for the soul. They thought death freed the soul, not that the body would rise again.
 - b. This idea was at odds with Christian teaching.
 - c. In Acts 17:32, Greeks mocked Paul for preaching resurrection. Paul would have been preaching to them standing alongside their Greek statues of idol worship. Some Corinthian Christians adopted this Greek mindset, denying the resurrection of the dead.

2. Paul Corrects Greek Philosophy in 1 Corinthians 15
 - a. Some in the Corinthian church said, “There is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:12).
 - b. But, if there's no resurrection, then Jesus didn't rise either. If Jesus didn't rise:
 - i. Our faith is empty - 1 Cor. 15:14
 - ii. We're still in our sins - 1 Cor. 15:17
 - iii. Christianity is pointless 1 Cor. 15:19
 - c. Paul teaches that the resurrection is real and bodily. Our bodies will be transformed—(glorified) 1 Cor. 15:42–44. Jesus' resurrection is the proof for us 1 Cor. 15:49.

3. Denying Resurrection = Moral Chaos
 - a. Without resurrection, there's no future judgment or eternal life. People might say, “Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” 1 Cor. 15:32. This leads to living however you want, without fear of consequences.
 - b. Titus 2:13 says that the coming of the Lord Jesus is our “blessed hope”. If you reject resurrection, you have no hope, you will scoff at those that do.
 - c. In 2 Peter 3:3–4, mockers say, “Where is his coming?” Denying resurrection leads to rejection of Jesus' return and judgment, leading to sinful living 2 Pet. 3:5–7.
 - d. If you deny the resurrection, you need to deny the rapture and second coming because a resurrected Christ is the One at the center of those

events. You also need to deny the millennial kingdom because a resurrected Christ will reign.

- e. 2 Peter 3:5 shows us that once the pathway of eroding Christ's role is eroded, you will need to make the conscious decision to forget what you once learned about creation – all Christian teaching will need to be walked back because it all points to a resurrected Christ.

4. Rejecting Resurrection Shows No Faith To Begin With

- a. Hebrews 6:1–2 lists resurrection and judgment as core Christian beliefs. Denying them undermines the whole faith.
- b. Hebrews 6:4–6 warns that those who reject these truths after hearing them can't be renewed to repentance. This isn't losing faith; it's proof they never had saving faith. This is the same idea that's pointed out in Romans 1 where God "gives them over" 3 times. If a person suppresses the truth with a lie, or willfully forgets the truth so as not to acknowledge the resurrection, they are not saved.

JUSTIN

- 1. Paul uses the phrase, "believed in vain." The Corinthian believers he wrote to were warned not to let go of what they "received," and took their "stand" on, and held "firmly" to (1-2). In other words, he came and introduced to them the teachings of the Gospel and in the beginning they believed what he taught (Acts 18:1-18). But he was worried they were being led astray into false teachings that undermined what he "passed on" to them (3). If they began to turn away from those teachings he gave them he says that they would have "believed in vain."
- 2. "Believed in vain" could have one of these possible meanings:
 - a. They believed and were truly saved but they let go of the teachings Paul gave them and thus lost their salvation
 - b. They believed and were truly saved, however, by letting go of Paul's teachings they would lose rewards even though they were still saved
 - c. Some "believed" but they were vain believers who would be in the category of the seed that fell on the rocky soil (Mt 13), those who abandon the faith following doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4), who were never truly saved but

only outwardly went along with other believers for reasons other than salvation

3. These teachings Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 15 are not “disputable” matters, like those he brought up in Romans 14. Those teachings there were secondary, which means there was room for disagreement in the fellowship of Christians. Paul was giving guidance in Romans 14 for how to fellowship with other believers who hold different views on these secondary matters. Here however, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is talking about doctrines “of first importance.” These are first order teachings where no disagreement is allowed. These are non-negotiables. What are these “first” order doctrines?
4. It has to do with the resurrection, which is a serious doctrine to tamper with. And people were tampering with it. Hymanaeus and Philetus taught the error that the resurrection had already happened (2 Timothy 2:17-18). But there in Corinth the opposite error was spreading: people were saying there was going to be no resurrection at all. The doctrine of the resurrection of mankind is non-negotiable. Hebrews 6:1-3 includes it as an “elementary teaching” that all Christians should be taught, which is another way of saying it was a doctrine of “first importance.”
5. The resurrection of the dead is the theme of the entire chapter. Every one of the 58 verses directly ties to the subject of the resurrection:
 - a. The historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection and over 500 eyewitnesses (v3-11)
 - b. Some Corinthians taught there was no resurrection of the dead (v12)
 - c. The logical follow through of no resurrection is that even Jesus was not resurrected (v13)
 - d. Then, if Christ was not resurrected then his ministry was false, the faith of the Corinthians was pointless, and the dead believers are lost in hell (14-19)
 - e. The resurrection of Jesus is directly connected to our resurrection, the return of Jesus to the earth, his kingdom on the earth, the defeat of death, and the eternal reign of God (20-28)

- f. If there is no resurrection then other things become pointless as well: baptism for the dead, Paul risking his life for the Gospel, hope that everything now counts for the future, denying pleasure (29-32)
- g. Rejecting the resurrection comes from ignorance of God and leads to sin (33-34)
- h. The kinds of resurrection bodies we will receive (35-53)
- i. The victory accomplished through the resurrection (26, 54-58)

6. After warning them not to believe in vain, Paul immediately takes his Corinthian readers through the recent and real history of Jesus' resurrection and that the resurrected Jesus was seen by over 500 people (3-11). Keep in mind that this is the specific message of the Apostle's preaching in the first days of the Church. In replacing Judas Peter explained, "For one of these men must become a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:22). Peter then preached the first sermon in Church history with these words, "God has raised up this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it." (Acts 2:32). Later, Paul would continue this Apostolic message of the resurrection of Jesus to the philosophers in Athens, "God has given proof to everyone [that he will judge the world with justice] by raising Jesus from the dead." (Acts 17:31).

7. Once he recounts Jesus' resurrection, he then points out the specific error going around in the Corinthian church: "how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (13) Apparently some people were making the case that there was no resurrection. These people were implying or accusing Paul of being a liar, since he claims to have seen Jesus resurrected. Corinth was a Greek city, right next to Athens - the heart of all Greek life and wisdom. It is very likely that Greek believers in Corinth were mixing in their Greek philosophy with their new Christian beliefs. The result was the subversion of the doctrines of the Christian faith (syncretism always subverts true biblical doctrine). The Greek man sought escape from the physical body and world. In the Greek man's outlook, the spiritual things were pure while the physical things were evil. So the Greek man wanted to be free from the evil physical body he was in so he could be a pure spirit, liberated from the physical flesh, with all its contamination. "...we'll surely attain happiness once we leave our bodies behind and cease to experience desire and competition." (Cicero, On Living And Dying Well, 27)

8. There's some parallel there for the Christian faith for sure here. Paul bemoans the flesh in Romans 7 and longs to be rescued from his body of death. However, God's revelation is dogmatic and clear that we are going to receive new and glorified bodies, like our Lord's own resurrected and glorified body (1 Cor 15:20-21). The rest of 1 Corinthians 15 goes on to make that case.
9. But this false teaching going around Corinth brought the full weight of Paul's apostolic and pastoral fight to bear down on it. He shows the error of the teaching along with the disastrous consequences of it. There are lessons for us to gain along the way. One of which is the interconnectedness of doctrines, which refers to the connection one doctrine has with others. This is important to see because as Paul goes on to explain if you undermine one doctrine you undermine others. And if you undermine "first" order doctrines you are in big trouble. And that is what some of the Corinthians were doing.
10. How does Paul show the interconnectedness of doctrines? He says if they believe that there is no resurrection then that means even Jesus wasn't raised (12-13). It is possible that people held mixed and inconsistent beliefs, which is always common. In other words, there may have been people who believed Jesus was raised up from the dead, but that no one else would be - Jesus was the only one. However, while today they agree Jesus was resurrected, they are also today laying the logical groundwork for rejecting his resurrection tomorrow. In other words, the same reasons they reject the general resurrection will be the same reasons they reject Jesus' resurrection. Or worse, there may have been people who "spiritualized" his resurrection and thought Jesus was raised up spiritually, but not physically. Or worse yet, people may have reduced the resurrection of Jesus to nothing more than his memory and impact living on in each of them. Here's the problem: error increases. Like leaven error grows. It develops. When we hold to a particular error what will happen is we will force everything to align with that error. If the Corinthians believed that there was no resurrection from the dead then eventually they would have to face the apostolic teaching that Jesus was raised. If he was literally raised up then their teaching was demolished and they would have to admit that there is a resurrection.
11. Then what we see here is that Paul is pointing out how illogical this teaching is because he is pointing out all the other doctrines that are connected to the

resurrection of Christ. And he is pointing out how close they are to denying that even Christ was raised up from the dead.

- a. If no one is resurrected then Christ was not resurrected which means Paul's ministry was false, the faith of the Corinthians was pointless, and their dead believers are lost in hell (14-19)
- b. If no one is resurrected then Christ was not resurrected which undermines other doctrines dependent on His resurrection: the return of Jesus to the earth, our resurrection when he comes, his kingdom on the earth, the defeat of death, and the eternal reign of God (20-28)
- c. If there is no resurrection then other things become pointless as well: baptism for the dead, Paul risking his life for the Gospel, hope that everything now counts for the future, denying pleasure (29-32)
- d. Rejecting the resurrection comes from ignorance of God and leads to sin (33-34)

12. If they insist no resurrection of the dead happens then what do they do with Jesus' resurrection? Here are two important take aways:

- a. The dangerous error they believed was bad enough (no resurrection), but it was going to lead to them denying the first order truth of Christ's resurrection. Error grows. If people have a core belief they will reconcile everything to that core belief as time goes on. Inconsistencies can't last long, they have to be interpreted through that core belief. So if some Corinthians had a core belief that there was no resurrection, then eventually they would reinterpret Jesus' physical resurrection to mean something else. To allow for his resurrection would undermine their core belief because his resurrection is a powerful evidence of a resurrection of everyone else. If the message of the Apostles is that Christ was resurrected is true, then so is their message that everyone will be resurrected in the same way. These Corinthians would have to abandon their pagan spiritualized views of the resurrection and adopt the apostolic teaching, or they would have to go all the way and deny even Jesus' physical resurrection. Paul knew this, and he knew this is what they would end up doing and he was hitting it head on immediately to keep disciples from following a distorted truth (Acts 20:29), being blown here and there by

false teachings (Eph. 4:14) and following deceiving doctrines taught by demons (1 Tim 4:1-2).

- b. They did not consider the danger of that error and its implications. They did not have understanding and were not wise according to God's wisdom (1 Cor 1). Therefore, they were like the seed on the path that "does not understand the message" (Mt 13:19). "The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their hearts." Whatever Paul sowed in the Corinthians' hearts, some of them were in danger of losing it because they did not understand the truth of what he taught them. They were unstable and vulnerable to false teachers (Eph 4:12-14), even "other Christs" (2 Cor 11:3-4).

- 13. So in conclusion, the Corinthians had faith, but some of them did not have real faith. Some of them, though "believing" (1 Cor 15:1-2), still their belief was not true belief. Similar to the seed on the path (Mt 13:19) and the Jews who "believed" Jesus but then opposed Him (John 8:31-59), they "belief" was not the true saving kind of belief. First Corinthians 15 describes those who believed things about Jesus but denied essential truths like the coming physical resurrection, which would lead them to deny Christ's own physical resurrection.