

"The Domino Effect of Disbelief"

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

The apostle Paul begins Ch. 15 with a reminder of the foundational gospel message:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried [according to the Scriptures], that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

But that was because he wanted to show us the connection that all 3 components have. Christ's death, burial and resurrection – the last point, resurrection, is the real issue Paul wants to focus on. When Paul says Jesus was raised from the dead, he means, as we see here in v.12 that He was resurrected from the dead. Jesus wasn't resuscitated like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter or the widow of Nain's son. They came back to this life in their earthly bodies and they would physically die one final time. What Paul means about resurrection is that Jesus died and came to life again in a sinless, eternal, physical body. The belief that you could physically exist after you died was not something the Greek world held to. It was a Jewish belief, but even then, not all Jews believed that. We know from the gospels that the Pharisees believed in a physical future existence after death whereas the Sadducees did not.

This is why Paul expands on the resurrected Christ and lists numerous eyewitness accounts of seeing a risen Jesus in a physical body after He died. This is a crucial belief to the Christian faith.

If we were to stand at a street corner in town and ask people what they believed after one dies we would hear numerous answers like,

- We don't know
- We don't go anywhere; we just cease to exist
- We come back to this world existing as someone or something else
- We become angels or spirits who float around in another dimension
- Our spirits will live somewhere in another dimension
- We'll go to heaven and float on clouds, eating Philadelphia cream cheese

Only a very few would suggest we get to live in new bodies on a new earth. And most of those would be born again believers in Christ, although the JW's believe that too. They believe you have to earn that, unlike those who place their faith in Christ.

But in the 1st century Greek world of Paul, the philosophies of Plato impacted the beliefs that people had about the afterlife. Plato taught that the soul and body were separate and that death was when the soul and body separate and the soul gets to enjoy life in the spiritual realm in which it was always meant to exist. So, the idea that you focused more on your mind/soul than your body was popular, as was the idea that one did not affect the other.

Paul of course disagreed. The body and soul are connected and even beyond death. He had proof. What proof? The resurrected Jesus. While we are soul and body and there is a separation of our soul from this body, believers in Christ get new eternal bodies that look similar to what we have now but are indestructible and we will live on a perfect earth where we'll never sin. Paul was essentially saying

Don't Let the Culture Transform Your Theology **(15:12)**

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?

I've mentioned a few times the Greek is very specific when it has conditional sentences. Paul is not doubting the resurrection when he says "if". In the Greek its called a 1st class conditional statement which means

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead [and we know He has been raised] how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead.

What does Paul do – and what should we do – to let the Bible transform our culture and not the other way around?

Keep teaching the truth (v.12a)

Paul is going to keep preaching that Jesus's bodily rose from the dead, which tells us what eventually happens when believers die. We will have new physical bodies like Jesus had a physical, resurrected body after death. This is why Paul gave numerous proofs of people seeing Jesus physical body after death. Since Jesus's resurrection is proof of our own physical resurrection one day, to deny our own is to deny Jesus had a physical resurrected body.

Many of these believers were influenced by the Greek culture, including what was said about the afterlife. Even today, everyone has different ideas about the afterlife. But only believers in Christ know the truth. When we accept Christ we have to grow spiritually. We have to retrain our minds which have been conformed to the thought patterns of this world. That's why Paul says in Rom. 12:2

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This doesn't happen overnight. When you've believed one thing for many years and have to come to understand the truth, you have to keep growing in that truth because we have a lot of bad information we've accumulated over the years be-cause we were inundated with lies. We believed what the majority believed without questioning it. We probably believed in evolution before we were saved. And for some, it takes a long time to deconstruct our false belief system. Or what Jesus called 'slow of heart'.

Avoid being slow of heart (v.12b)

When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared later that Sunday to the two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and He asked the why they were downcast, they literally explained the gospel when they told him that Jesus was killed, whom they considered a prophet and in who they had placed their hope. But women went to His tomb earlier that day and did not find His body and that they had seen angels who said Jesus was alive. And others knew verified the empty tomb. And Jesus responded 'Duh, are you listening to yourself!'

You foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to come into His glory?

This is what the Word says about these things. And Paul is saying the same thing; this is what God's Word says about resurrection. We'll all have perfect bodies one day if we know Christ. Why are we still unsure about some basic things in the Bible? Because we're not believing what it says. Or we don't want to believe what it says because maybe, well-meaning pastors, bible teachers, biblical personalities and even parents told us differently. And that's hard. But Jesus is going to assess us on how we lived individually. He'll test us on how we believed and practiced what the Bible says, not did we obey our parents' teaching even if it was incorrect. I'm all for obeying and respecting our parents but not when they disagree with the Bible.

We need to grow spiritually more and more. Grow in the Word. Let the Bible inform and not our culture nor even our family at times. Because Paul points out here,

Bad Theology Has Significant Consequences **(15:12-19)**

When we're wrong about one thing it can lead us to be wrong about many things. Sometimes major things. And this was one of them. We have to know what happens to us after we die in Christ. Because if we're not sure how can we share the hope of the gospel? And for Paul, this issue was all about the gospel. If we don't believe we will have physical, resurrected bodies after we die in Christ, that had a domino effect on many things.

So Paul explains it this way:

If we are not physically resurrected after death ...

a) *Jesus life and ministry was meaningless (v.13)*

¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

This was the whole point of Jesus' rising from the dead, to give us the assurance that we too will rise from death and physically exist in new perfect bodies like Jesus. To doubt the latter is to disbelieve the former, for Paul. The two go hand in hand.

And if Jesus didn't rise

b) *Our purpose is lost and we are liars (vv.14-15)*

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.

If we're proclaiming a gospel that doubts a physical resurrection, then we're not telling the truth. If we tell people about Jesus but don't believe everything about Jesus, why do we do it? What is our real purpose then?

And if we're not telling the truth about the resurrection then how do we know our sins have been paid? We won't. To deny a physical resurrection, Paul says, means

c) *Our sins will never be paid for (vv.16-17)*

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

When you play this out to its logical conclusion Paul says, what assures your sins being paid for if Jesus did not conquer death and have a body again? A body that no longer is affected by sin's impact.

And those who have fallen asleep (i.e. believers who have already died)

d) *Those who have died are gone forever (v.18)*

¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

Again, Paul is taking this to its logical conclusion if there is no bodily resurrection for believers. If there is no assurance of the resurrected Jesus then we can't be certain of our own which means the proof that one has victory over death and sin is in doubt. The domino effect continues and logically then Paul says about those who are still alive and tell people there is hope in Jesus who rose from the dead but we don't

e) *Who invest our life in Christ should be pitied (v.19)*

Why? Because we've wasted our life telling people they can't know what will happen in the next life – if there is one. So these are all consequential results for "some" who say they believe Jesus rose from the dead and walked around in a physical body but say we won't. But Paul doesn't believe this because he declares in v.20

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

But the Truth [resurrection] Changes Everything **(15:20)**

And now he will show the positive consequences of this true fact that since Jesus rose from the dead, physically, in a new indestructible, never to decay, body, everyone who places their faith in Christ has this assurance.

The sad thing about the domino effect of the consequences of believing the wrong thing is true. If you're trusting in yourself or some other religion or some other saviour's messages that contradict Jesus' message, then they have no hope and no assurance of a future with God. And because they've invested their lives in pursuits that have nothing to do with the biblical gospel, then they are to be pitied because they will not only lose out in eternity, they will have wasted this great gift called life that God Himself gave them. Created them uniquely in His image; sent His very own Son to die for their sins; proved there is life after death in a physical body that can never perish and sent people to share this gospel message of hope with them and they said, 'No, I don't believe it and I don't want it.'

Yet, saying you don't believe the gospel of Jesus Christ or doubt the existence of God and a life with Him forever, is like denying there is gravity. You can deny it all you want; but its' evidence is clear and all around you and you can't make a move in life without the evidence of God's handiwork all around you.

So let's not give up sharing this great message of hope. 'Some' will doubt but 'some' will believe. And they will come to realize what a great domino effect of blessings to come are in store for them.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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