

30. Living for the future, now

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Many people want to know their future. It is a fascinating subject to talk about and plan ahead, but we cannot really change what might happen along the way. But we have no idea what might interrupt our future and reshape it in a matter of a few hours or days.

When I was living in South Korea long ago, the world news didn't affect me that much. I am sure that it had something to do with being young. But now I realize how little the human race has control over what happens on this earth. To name a few elements that might change everything we prepared for are severe weather, earthquakes, tsunami, wildfire, and war. It seems we almost are helpless when these kind of things happen to our lives.

However, those things may change our physical world, but they really cannot change our spiritual world, if we don't let them. Regardless where, what kind, and when the time period we live, we can face our unknown future head on, because we have the all knowing God, the Savior Jesus Christ. For the unbelievers who do not have Jesus in their hearts, I am surprised that there are not more insane people and more suicides, because everything they count on can be taken away from them in a matter of a short time.

In this chapter 15, the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Bible is going to show us how to live for the future now, so that we can be prepared spiritually for the Lord.

A. A THEOLOGICAL CAN OF WORMS?

1 Corinthians 15:29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

After building his case for the resurrection of Jesus on history in v1-11, theology in v12-19, and prophecy in v20-28, Paul turns to practicality and everyday logic to help carry the burden of proof of resurrection.

With v29, Paul opens a theological can of worms that many theologians today can't seem to agree on how to put a lid on it.

What does it mean to be "baptized for the dead"? Some, especially Mormons, take this to mean "proxy baptism," where a believer is baptized on behalf of a dead relative. But we find absolutely no such teaching in the New Testament. This kind of the heretic theology should not even be discussed among the believers, because according to the Bible, first, salvation is a personal matter that each of us must decide for oneself; and, second, nobody needs to be baptized to be saved.

I heard that there are more than 30 different interpretations for this v29. Regardless of the interpretation of this verse, Paul's point is clear: if there were no resurrection, such a practice would be nothing more than an empty religious practice. It would be totally absurd, much like believing that there is a purgatory.

B. NO RESURRECTION, NO MAS

1 Corinthians 15:30-32 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die

daily. 32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

In the early first century church, being associated with Christianity wasn't one of the most popular things to do, because the Christians were often persecuted, even killed, for their faith.

Think about this, folks. If there's no eternity, why not live it up? Why not say, "Yes" to all the flesh's cravings? Why die to our desires? Why live to please Christ? Like they say, "Whoever has the gold, makes the rules!" or "He who dies with the most toys wins." If there's no resurrection, we are fools to live pure and holy lives. But the way, Paul lived his life all-out for the Gospel was an evidence of the truth of the resurrection. This man's IQ is probably higher than the combined credit score of some of us. Besides, he was tutored by the Risen Savior Jesus Himself.

Most of us are so concerned about living comfortable lives here on earth that our lives give no evidence of the resurrection. Paul lived such a committed Christian life, people could look at him and say, "There is no way he would live like that unless there was a reward waiting for him in heaven."

In v31, Paul boasts a little here. He says that he dies daily. What does it mean? It is easy for those who have been in the Lord to think that this is our spiritual identification with the death of Jesus. But he does not speak of the spiritual putting to death of the flesh. According to the context, we can see that he writes of the constant imminent danger to his physical life. One example of that can be found in the Book of Acts:

Acts 23:12-13 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.

When it comes to the physical attacks that the apostle Paul went through, I don't believe that anyone can top his resume:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness

Since the most of us don't face danger like Paul, let me put this in a little different way. If the Lord chooses to take any one of us home today with persecution or a sudden death, are you ready to meet your Savior? Please don't take what I am about to tell you as something you hear, goes in one ear and out the other:

- **When your family and friends get together to think about you and to talk about you, would they remember you as a godly person who tried to live the life that honored the Lord Jesus?**
- **When your family members are going through what you had in the closets, garage, boxes, and containers, would they find anything that would disgrace the name of our Lord?**

- **When your family members or friends face difficulties of their own, would they wish that you are still around so that you could give them godly and sound advice that comes from your own life?**

Something to think about. If the answers they find are all “Yes,” that is the true legacy, not some wealth that can be spent or taken away.

The question Paul raises in v32 is much like the last one, yet it goes deeper into the matter of motivation and reward.

Paul’s reference to the wild beasts is probably best taken as a metaphor for the adversaries he faced in Ephesus as we will see in the next chapter.

The following points all support a metaphorical interpretation of the “beasts at Ephesus”:

1) As a Roman citizen, Paul probably wouldn’t have been thrown into the arena to fight with beasts, since this practice was reserved mainly for those who were heathens, savages, or slaves.

2) In his extensive autobiography in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, Paul never mentions wild beasts, but instead talks about dangers:

2 Corinthians 11:26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren

3) Meticulous Dr. Luke who authored the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, doesn’t mention wild beasts in relation to Paul. He mentions stoning, trials, ill-treatment, and suffering, but no wild beasts.

I believe that Paul may mean “beasts” figuratively, in reference to his violent and wild human opponents as he faced at Ephesus in Acts 19:21-41.

Paul’s other proof for the resurrection in this section is also compelling. If there is no resurrection, then there is no future judgment to consider.

If there was a person who lived up the way his or her carnal heart desired, it would be king Solomon who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. He had power, intelligence, wealth beyond measure, fame, and popularity. Practically the sky was the limit. Though he had it all, he was empty.

A phrase Solomon used many times in Ecclesiastes is “*under the sun.*” By using this phrase, Solomon was speaking of a horizontal, strictly human viewpoint of life. He was declaring that there was no fulfillment in life under the sun – in other words, in life without God. He chose to learn it the hard way. Once he began his backsliding into human carnality, Solomon rarely looked above the sun for answers. He proved that the attempt to meet the deepest needs of our lives, while leaving God out of the equation, will leave us empty.

This is ironic when you consider his life story. King David, the man after God’s own heart, had raised his son Solomon in a godly home. When David was on his deathbed, he had called young Solomon in to remind him of what really mattered in life.

1 Chronicles 28:9 “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord

searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.

In other words, David had been saying, "Son, you can't live off of your old man's faith. You need to get your own. You need to serve God with an undivided heart. You need to completely commit yourself to Him. This is the secret I have learned about life."

For a time Solomon did follow the words that his father gave him. Then he allowed his heart to be divided. He tried to love the Lord and the world. According to Scripture, that just doesn't work.

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

During the time of the apostle Paul, there was a big philosophical movement. It was known as Epicureanism. Epicureans were the followers of Epicurus who died at Athens 270 B.C. This philosophy was a system of atheism, and taught men to seek as their highest aim of a pleasant and smooth life. They have been called the "Sadducees" of Greek paganism. They, with the Stoics, ridiculed the teaching of Paul according to Acts 17. They were "Present Pleasure Seekers – shortsighted people. Their philosophy appealed to the mass crowd of Greek and still appeal to the majority of the world population, even to many born-again Christians.

C. THE IMPORTANCE OF BELIEF IN RESURRECTION

Paul's questions were originally posed to a cluster of people who didn't believe in the resurrection. But the implications of his questions can sustain our faith as well:

1) Belief in the resurrection tightens our ties with believers who have died. – v29

Because of the resurrection, we are connected by a timeless bond to Paul, Peter, other disciples, our family, friends, any believer who has died.

2) Belief in the resurrection acts as a moral safeguard. – v32b

Often, the issue at the heart of sensuality isn't moral impurity, but temporal vision. If we kick the door shut toward the idea of a future, it's easy to live guilt-free in impure situations. But remembering that there IS a tomorrow, that life isn't just one big "NOW ONLY," will motivate us to live pure and holy lives.

3) Belief in the resurrection makes today's trials bearable. – v32a

Knowing our faith will be rewarded in the future gives us strength to face our own "wild beasts." We who cling to the hope of the resurrection should ask ourselves 3 questions – Is this belief in the resurrection in theory only? Or are our lives changed? Are we living as if behavior today will affect our tomorrow?

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Don't be deceived

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Quoting a proverb from Greek literature, Paul encourages us to disbelieve those who deny the resurrection. Do you surround yourself with godly people to imitate?

2) Become sober-minded

1 Corinthians 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

We've got to wake up to the fact that our society devours personal identity, encourages physically-driven living and following-the-crowd philosophies. Do you handle everything with discernment? Do you take every thought captive to the obedience of the Lord as it is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:5?

The behavior of the Corinthian Christians as well as their confusion about basic Christian truths shows a lack of knowledge, not a lack of salvation. Let's not judge others on what they do not yet understand. Faith in Christ is what counts. But faith is supposed to be a foundation for growth, not an excuse to remain ignorant.

3) When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we are to stop, confess it to God, and be cleansed.

1 Peter 1:14-16 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Nothing is as exciting, satisfying, or rewarding as living a life patterned after godly principles. Nothing!