

What if?

April 24, 2011

"What if Christianity is not true?"

"What if all that you hold onto, this faith in God of Christianity, is nothing more than a delusion based upon someone's carefully crafted deception?"

"What if at the end of your Christian life all you have is a handful of wishful thinking?"

These three questions can drop huge rocks of doubt in the hearts of people who are not so sure about the God of Christianity. The ripple effect of this doubt can make many people stumble and even fall away from the faith in Jesus Christ. That is the precise objective satan wants to accomplish.

These questions are not anything new. A little twist here and a little change there, they have been there throughout human history. It was there at the Garden of Eden when satan tempted Eve to take the forbidden fruit as an expression of disobedience to God; it was there at the time when Jesus walked on earth. The Jewish religious rulers tried to shut Him down every step of the way for three years; it was there when apostle Paul penned his letter to the believers of the church of Corinth. It is still there amongst so-called "Social Gospel Christians."

This morning's Scripture texts come from chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. We will start from v12.

A. NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD?

1 Corinthians 15:12-13 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

Why has Paul so carefully proved the resurrection of Jesus? It wasn't because the Corinthian Christians believed that Jesus did not rise from the dead. In fact, he makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 15:11 that they did believe it:

1 Corinthians 15:11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Then why was it important? In spite of the clear word of the Old Testament, in spite of the clear word of Jesus, and in spite of the clear word of the apostle Paul, the Corinthians had come to the place where they were denying the bodily resurrection of believers. They had bought the bag of Greek philosophers who taught that the soul was immortal, but the body was not and it was good-bye forever. According to them, immortality had only to remain in the spiritual.

In other words, they were flatly saying dead men don't rise again. That was the statement of Greek philosophy and that was being parroted by the Corinthian church, at least a few in the church.

The problem with their thought is that it was baseless. Instead of obeying what the Lord was teaching them through apostle Paul, they'd rather listen to false teachings. It only shows their spiritual immaturity and lack of discernment in the Word of God.

That is the precise point apostle Paul is making in his methodical and systematic approach in this teaching. But before we get to his teaching, one thing we must

notice is that every powerful aspect of Christianity is hinged on one thing – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Please allow me to explain it.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is far more important than His death on the cross. If He was not raised from the dead, it is nothing more than God died and He could not overcome the power of death.

1 Corinthians 15:26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

In other words, God of Christianity is not as powerful as He claims to be. That would be a serious problem to God since He claimed to be “Almighty God.”

This is the reason why Satan is doing everything he can to destroy, confuse, and malign the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His followers.

The style of Paul’s argument here in chapter 14 is known as a logical deduction. Paul uses a contrary to fact statement, and he says, if that statement is true that dead men don’t rise, then Christ didn’t rise and if Christ didn’t rise, etc, etc.

I don’t want you to miss a very important point Paul is making here. You see, dead men don’t rise, but Christ really isn’t a man since He is risen. Yes, Jesus Christ is a man. You ask, “A half man?” No, 100% a man and 100% God. Some will say, “That ain’t possible.” That’s right, that is why He is God and you ain’t.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

B. EMPTY WITHOUT RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

There is no “Good News of Jesus Christ” for man apart from the resurrection of Jesus. There is no need for church or anything that deals with Jesus; it all would be just a big waste of time, if there is no resurrection.

Then, someone will say, “Wait a minute there, hombre. There is a lot of good moral and ethical teaching in the Bible!” But what kind of moral and ethical teaching can we believe if Jesus who proclaimed them was a liar of His resurrection? Christianity apart from the resurrection is like asking a man to carry a two hundred-pound air conditioner in 107 degree heat without any power to run it.

God can’t help us if there is no resurrection. A dead religious teacher, no matter how wise and worthy in his earthly existence, has no power to change one hair upon our head. If the resurrection of Jesus is not true then upon every believer’s grave ought to be a marker that says, “Believed for nothing, lived for nothing and died for nothing!”

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Noah, David, Gideon, Samson, Barak, Jephthah, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and all the rest – all had an empty faith in a God who couldn’t pull off the salvation He planned, because He couldn’t raise His Son out of the grave, if dead men don’t rise.

And all those precious people in chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews, those people who had trials of mockings and scourgings and imprisonments and were stoned and sawed in half, and tested and slain by swords and wandered in sheep skins and goats skins and destitute and afflicted and tormented, those of whom the world wasn't worthy who wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. All of those people who through faith held on to God were stupid. Their faith was useless if the dead don't rise.

C. LIAR, LIAR

1 Corinthians 15:15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up-- if in fact the dead do not rise.

If the resurrection is not true, apostle Paul and the disciples of Jesus Christ must have conspired together to deliberately deceive millions and billions of innocent people in human history.

They need to be placed in the same historical category as Hitler and Stalin as the greatest deceivers the world has ever seen. They led countless number of the followers of Christ to suffer needlessly, even to their deaths as martyrs for a lie! If there is no resurrection then Jesus is not only not a "victor" but not a mere "victim" either, instead it would make Him a "villain" as He led others to suffer needlessly for a faith He proclaimed to be true.

You know what, how many death row convicts do you know, not necessarily in person, who is willing to be executed for someone else's lie? None. If Jesus' resurrection was not true; if they were the ones who stole the dead body of Jesus while the squad of brave Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb; if they came up with all these lies, at least one of those disciples would have spilled his gut and confessed before his execution. Don't you think?

No, all of them with the exception of apostle John were murdered or executed for the name of Jesus Christ. They all had a choice to bail out, or keep their mouths shut, but they didn't think about their own earthly lives that much. Doesn't that tell you something – like the truth worth dying for?

D. YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS

1 Corinthians 15:16-17 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

In these two verses Paul restates the major premise of his argument. But he also added a kicker at the end of v17 – sin's power is unbroken if there was no resurrection of Jesus and His people. Do you know what it means? If Jesus was not raised from the dead, sin has its power over Him. That means that His atoning sacrifice for our sins was not made, thus God couldn't forgive our sins.

E. WITHOUT CHRIST WE ALL ARE PERISHED AND PITIFUL

1 Corinthians 15:18-19 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

If the dead rise not and Christ didn't rise, then you're still in your sins when you die. Hell holds them all. Satan won, God lost if the dead don't rise. If that is the case, there is no hope for tomorrow. You might as well make the best of this world however you want and die like a pig. Doesn't that sound so hopeless? It's a crushing argument, folks.

However, resurrection is not merely life after death. It is the continuation of life after death in glorified bodies, which are our present bodies in a glorified state.

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

1 Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Not only does the Bible tell us we will live beyond the grave, but it also tells us there is hope beyond this life. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead proves there is life beyond the grave for the believer.

Acts 17:31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead

F. THE POWER OF DEATH IS BROKEN

The resurrection of Christ gives us power to live the Christian life.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Resurrection, therefore, promises us that God will not only give us life beyond the grave, but He will give us power to live the Christian life on earth. We have hope in Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection.

The Resurrection is no peripheral issue. It provides power to Christianity, freedom from sin, and joy to followers of Christ.

That hope in Jesus Christ is available to everyone who wants to be saved. But the majority of people choose not to receive Jesus' invitation to be His followers according to His way, not any other way. Many say, "I can make my way to heaven because I am a good person," or "I am a religious person," or "I believe in God, but not in the way the Bible says." Some will say, "This is ridiculous. I don't want to hear that I cannot go to heaven because I live the way I want."

That is exactly what this person used to think as well.