

The summary of the Gospel (15:1-11) was not merely intended to instruct concerning the message, but to respond to a denial of resurrection that had appeared among the Corinthian believers. Logically, if there is by principle no resurrection of man, then Christ also could not have been raised. If Christ were not raised, our message would be useless, we would be false witnesses, and our lives should be pitied (15:12-19).

But Christ was indeed raised from the dead and there are consequences (15:20-28). As the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” he is a guarantee that many others will follow in physical resurrection. The risen Christ will also bring all things into their proper relation of submission to God.

In 15:29-34 Paul returns to the conjecture “what if there were no resurrection” and focuses on how the future resurrection of believers can and should motivate. He is a vital hope and provides incentive for a different life now. Though admittedly difficult, based upon a probable interpretation we can understand it as revealing various incentives arising from the future physical resurrection.

### **I. *The hope of the resurrection can lead some to profess Christ. (15:29)***

1. Most of a multitude of attempted interpretations of this verse can be grouped according to how they understand baptism, how they identify “the dead”, how they explain “for the dead”, and finally who this group might be. But certain features limit the number of viable suggestions. (a) Whatever the meaning, it must give support for a future bodily resurrection. (b) Paul apparently distinguishes himself from those who were baptized “for the dead.” (c) It probably was not something of which Paul disapproved, and if that is true, then it must not contradict other Scripture.
2. Hence, there are some notable interpretations which must be rejected. It cannot be a baptism for the salvation of the dead, since baptism does not save. It cannot be a vicarious or proxy baptism, i.e., being baptized for someone else who had died before getting baptized. (It is contrary to the Scriptural teaching on baptism that it is one’s own testimony of faith in Christ. It lacks any historical evidence from that time period.
3. An appealing explanation suggests that the dead are believers whose testimony was compelling, especially their hope in the resurrection in the face of death. Others, moved by that testimony and hope, came to Christ and in turn professed Him publically in baptism. This fits the textual boundaries, grammatical and theological challenges, and explains the absence in historical of any special baptism from that time period.

If this is a correct understanding, then there is a hope in the future physical resurrection of the believer which can motivate people to turn to Christ. Christ has conquered death and takes away the fear of death. If we were facing death, would our conviction be a persuasive testimony?

### **II. *The assurance of the resurrection gives reason to endure suffering for the sake of Christ. (15:30-32)***

1. Paul presents his own suffering in a number of ways: he and his co-workers endanger themselves every hour (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:23-27); he dies every day, i.e., he daily abandons life. (For those who lose their lives for Christ’s sake will find it.) As an example, figuratively, he faces vicious opposition in Ephesus.
2. Paul expected to profit, but a profit tied to resurrection. He quotes Isaiah 22:13. Instead of repenting from sin, Israel chose to party, for which sin there was no atonement. Without a physical resurrection there was no profit in suffering. But because of the physical resurrection, there was profit in suffering. The future physical resurrection of believers is a reason to endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

The resurrection is an incentive to accept suffering for Christ now. Why put up with such suffering if there were no resurrection?

### **III. *The conviction of the resurrection guards from wrong living. (15:33-34).***

1. These last two verses addresses moral issues. The warning against deception is regularly used (1 Cor 6:9; Gal 6:7; James 1:16) of doctrinal deviation where there are immediate results in one’s life. It is a warning of moral failure. The quote from pagan literature warns against the corruption of good character. Plus Paul charges to stop sinning.
2. But the context points to the doctrinal problem of a denial of the resurrection. Proponents of that false teaching were “bad company” and “ignorant of God.” The charge is similar to Jesus evaluation of the Sadducees who disbelieved the resurrection: they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Denial of the resurrections shows a failure understand the power of God, nor the full work of Christ on the cross. This was a shameful condition for the Corinthians.
3. If you associate with those who think wrong about truth, it will eventually cause you to live wrong. If the Corinthians associated with those deny the resurrection, it would eventually affect their moral character. Such toleration would lead to wrong living.

*Cf.* 1 John 3:1-3. To hope in the return of Christ (and our resurrection) means that we purify ourselves – an incentive to live correctly now. The resurrection should not be to us something merely theoretical, about some unrelated future time. It has its incentives for today. Are we living like it does?