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Resurrection Incentives
15: 29-34

Resurrection Incentives DIG: Why is bodily resurrection important? What three powerful incentives does Paul give? What's wrong with the idea that believers will not have bodies in eternity? What things would be true if Messiah had not been raised from the dead?

REFLECT: What does the resurrection mean to you personally? Think of a loved one that has passed away that you really miss seeing, being with, and talking to. How does the resurrection comfort you? How can you use the resurrection to witness about the Lord?

If you remove the resurrection, you have removed one of the greatest motivations the Lord gives for coming to Messiah and for living for Him.

Paul is almost ready to discuss what a **resurrection body** might look like (**to see link click Dv – Our Resurrection Bodies**). But before doing so, **he** has a few final considerations on the doctrine of **the resurrection** of **the body**. **He** shows **the Corinthians** how the false doctrine of no **resurrection** that was being spread by **some** in the church made no sense, neither practically nor theologically. **He** then proceeds with a final warning.[491]

When **the Sadducees**, who did not believe in **the resurrection**, asked **Yeshua** the mocking and insincere question about whose **wife** a certain **woman** would be in **the resurrection** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ja – Whose Wife Will She Be at the Resurrection?**), **He** first told them that **they** understood neither **the Scriptures** nor **the power of God**. After declaring that there **is no marriage in heaven**, **He** continued: **And as for whether the dead are resurrected, haven't you read what God said to you, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jaocb?" He is the God of the living, not the dead (Matthew 22:31-32).** The emphasis is **His** statement was on the verb **"I am"** because **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** were spiritually alive at the time **Yeshua** spoke, and one day would be united with **their** glorified **bodies** in **the**

resurrection. It is as if **Paul** was saying, "Presently, right now, **I am the God of Abrahm, Isaac, and Jacob."** That statement was true because there is **life** after **death**.

*Dear Loving Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that we can know for sure that there is **life** after **death**. No matter how good or how bad this **life** is, it is a wonderful thought that there is a real heaven where **You** are in complete control and where **You** have wiped out **crying**, **dying**, sadness and pain. **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).** Thank **You** for being **the God of Abrahm, Isaac, and Jacob,** for that means that **You** never get old nor forget my name, but **You** have all the time in the world to purify and refine me **(First Peter 1:7). You** have my name constantly before **You**, so I never walk alone for **You** are always present with me **(Hebrews 13:5)**.*

*It is such a comfort that **Messiah** totally defeated **death** and **rose** in triumph! **For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. . . Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:5, 8). Life** in heaven after the **resurrection** of our earthly bodies, is like going to a party that never stops for we will **live** with **You** forever in **Your** home of peace and joy! Thank **You** so much for all **You** suffered so we could go to heaven. As best as I can, I want to **live** my **life** in loving obedience to **You**. I want **You** to be first in my thoughts, time and affection. **You** are the best, and worthy of all my love! In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of **His resurrection**. Amen.*

Scripture is not theological, impractical, or irrelevant. Because **the Sadducees** denied any **resurrection**, **they** could not think right or live right, as is obvious in **their** response to the **life** and work of **Messia**h. Right doctrine is inseparably connected to right moral behavior and right principles are given to lead to right conduct. **God's** truth not only is to be believed, but it's to be properly responded to. In other words, we need to obey **God's Word**. When **its** truth is denied, there are devastating moral and spiritual consequences.

Paul's major thrust here in **15:29-34** is that if you remove **the resurrection**, if you deny this crucial and wonderful truth of **God's** redemptive work, you have removed one of the greatest motivations **the Lord** gives for coming to **Messiah** and for living for **Him**. Therefore, **Paul** points out **three powerful incentives the**

resurrection gives.

An incentive for salvation (15:29): The context is **the resurrection**. There are two groups of believers in view here. The first group incorrectly thinks that **they** can be **baptized** for **their dead** pagan loved ones and thus snatch them out of the flames of hell and send them to heaven. The second group does not believe in **the resurrection**. What **Paul** does here is use the first group as an example to the second group, emphasizing the incentive for salvation.

To the first group: **Otherwise, what will those** believers **do who are baptized for the dead (15:29a)?** When **Paul** mentions **those who are baptized**, **he** was simply referring to pagan Gentiles who had become believers (and subsequently **baptized**) as a result of the persuasive testimony of other faithful believers who had since passed away. The pagans heard the Good News and looked at their lives and said to themselves, "I want what they have in this **life**, and I also want to be able to see my unsaved loved ones who have **died**." Evidently, some believers in **Corinth** were promoting this false view of **baptism** which **Paul** used as an argument against the second group who denied **the resurrection**.

This group of misguided **Corinthian** believers failed to understand that since one person's faith cannot save another, then certainly one person's **baptism** cannot save another. **Baptism** is simply an outward sign of an inward conviction. No one is saved by **baptism** – not even living people, muchless **dead** ones. **It is appointed for mankind to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27).** There was no **hope** of a second change of salvation for the lost because **death** ends all opportunity for redemption and for spiritual help of any kind. This should have been a real example to those who denied **the resurrection** in **Corinth**. Since there *is* **a resurrection**, however, this is a real incentive for witnessing to unbelievers.

This verse does not teach that we can have a vicarious, or proxy, baptism **for the dead**, as claimed by ancient gnostic heretics such as Marcion and by the Mormon church today. In their practice, individuals go to their local Mormon temple, dress appropriately for a baptism, representatively adopt the name of a person who has died, and then the Mormon is baptized in water for that deceased person. This way, the **dead** person has supposedly fulfilled the requirements of salvation in the afterworld and can enjoy further spiritual benefits in the spiritual realm. But, the Mormons are incorrect. They have usurped this verse and taken it out of context. If one person's faith cannot save another, then clearly one person's baptism cannot

save another. The only way any person has ever come to **God** is by faith.

To the second group: Therefore, **Paul** asked rhetorically: In reality, **if the** unregenerate **dead are not raised** to heaven **at all,** ever, **why then are** many present believers being **baptized for them (15:29b)? Paul** reasoned that even if **some** of the **Corinthian** believers were ignorantly and vainly attempting to be **baptized** for **their dead** pagan loved ones so **they** could see **them** again; nevertheless, there *is* a **resurrection** (see the commentary on **Revelation Ff – Blessed and Holy are Those Who Have Part in the First Resurrection**), and that should be the real motivation for witnessing to unbelievers!

Before proceeding, I would like to add a word of caution. There are those, like the Mormons, who build a whole doctrine off of one verse. Others, even believers, have very strong opinions built upon one verse in the Bible. When the Protestant Reformation began, they used the expression, "Scripture interprets Scripture." By this they meant that obscure passages in Scripture must be understood in light of clearer ones. Since the Bible is **God's Word**, it must be consistent within itself. No one part of the Bible can contradict any other part. One divine **Author** – **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** – inspired the entire Bible, so it has one marvelous, supernatural unity. This is called "the synthesis principle." If we hold to an interpretation of one passage that does not square with something in another passage, one of the passages is being interpreted incorrectly – or possibly both of them. **The Spirit of God** does not disagree with **Himself**. And the passages with obvious meanings should interpret the more difficult ones. Therefore, one should never build any doctrine on a single obscure or unclear text.[492]

An incentive for service (15:30-32): The second incentive that **hope** of **the resurrection** gives us is for service. Why, otherwise, would believers endure and sacrifice so much? If there were no **resurrection** of the believing **dead**, then suffering and dying for the sake of the gospel would be masochistic, suffering for suffering's sake. As **Paul** has already pointed out: **If it is only for this life that we have put our hope in the Messiah, we are more pitiable than anyone (15:19).**

For that matter, why make this **life** miserable if this **life** is all there is? **Why keep facing danger hour by hour and dying every day**, if we have no security to look forward to **(15:30-31)**? **Why** engage in self-denying ministry if **death** ends it all? It's as if **Paul** is saying, " If **Messiah's resurrection** was the only **resurrection** (as some of **the Corinthians** believed) then **His** being **raised** was

no victory for us. **He** would not have been **the first fruits** of more to come (see **Dt – Messiah: The Firstfruits of Those Who Have Fallen Asleep**). **He** would not have conquered **death**, but only made **it** a greater mockery for those who put their trust in **Him**. But, as always, **Yeshua** is our model, **and for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).** It was **His** anticipation of **the resurrection**, of being raised to be with **His Father** once again, that gave our **Lord** the notice for dying on our behalf. **He** was willing **to die** for us because **He** knew **He** would be **raised** for us.[493]

If my fighting figuratively **with "wild beasts" in Ephesus** (see the commentary on **Acts Ch – Idol-Makers Start a Riot in Ephesus**) **was done merely on a human basis, what do I gain by it?** Although this was not an experience in the arena, it was like it to **Paul** in that he saw no **hope** of deliverance. Why face that kind of danger if this **life** is all there is?[494] **If dead people are not raised, we might as well live by the saying, "Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (First Corinthians 15:32; Isaiah 22:13 and 56:12).**



An incentive for sanctification (15:33-34): Paul ends this section with a warning, presumably to those in **Corinth** who were under the influence of the heretical doctrine of no **resurrection**. **Don't be fooled. "Bad company ruins good character" (15:33).** This timeless principle can also be applied to all of us no matter what age or generation. Peer pressure , going along with the crowd, can lead an otherwise **good** person into **bad** behavior. Apparently there were **some people** in **Corinth** doing exactly this, believing there were no consequences for immoral behavior since there was no **resurrection**. Such **people** had no true **knowledge of God** despite claiming to be so **wise** (see **An – The Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom**). As a result, **they** were being easily led into **sinning**.[495] So, **he**

warned **them** very bluntly: **Come to your senses! Live righteously and stop sinning! I say this to your shame (15:34).** What a **shameful** thing to be living selfishly living in **sin** while multitudes **die** without **Messiah**!