

Change begins in the mind

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Pastor Wyley Jenkins, Jr.

The Black Death was a devastating global epidemic of bubonic plague that struck Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s. The plague arrived in Europe in October 1347, when 12 ships from the Black Sea docked at the Sicilian port of Messina. The People gathered on the docks were met with a horrifying surprise: Most sailors aboard the ships were dead, and those still alive were gravely ill and covered in black boils that oozed blood and pus. Sicilian authorities hastily ordered the fleet of “death ships” out of the harbor, but it was too late: Over the next five years, the Black Death would kill more than 20 million people in Europe – almost one-third of the continent’s population. During that period, there was no real understanding of what caused the plague. Some blamed God’s judgment. Others blamed it on certain religious groups. One interesting fact is that some Christian communities believed that witches were turning into cats and cursing people. So these people began to kill all the cats. The true problem was a bacterial infection. This infection traveled in many ways. One of the most common was on rats and mice. When the people killed the cats, the mice and rats multiplied. The Jewish communities did not believe that cats were witches and did not kill the cats. Without a doubt, the Jewish communities were some of the least affected by the plague.

This story holds a valuable lesson for us all. Bad ideas are not just wrong or different; they can be dangerous and even deadly. Recent research shows that Christians don’t want to think. They prefer sermons that do not explain the Bible. They prefer emotional, exciting or highly practical messages even if it is not in God’s word. Though we live in the time of the easiest access to Bible knowledge in history, the church is more biblically uneducated than ever. We need to realize that all change begins not in a to-do list or a step-by-step list, but in the word of God. Ideas about God do not only come in statements like “God is love”, or “God is the trinity”. Ideas come through stories.

The reason we study books like 1 Samuel with the young adults group is that we desperately need to know who God is. God has given us stories to tell who he is. He has also given us songs called the Psalms. These songs express the relationship we have with God in real words, with emotions like anger, peace, joy, fear and sadness. We desperately need the right ideas about God. They are bread for our souls. Today, in our passage, we see the concern of the Apostle Paul for the Corinthians. Some of them were denying that resurrection was possible. The Apostle gives us three thoughts about this denial:

1. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the salvation of the Gospel (v. 12-19).
2. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the story of the Gospel (v. 20-28).
3. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the transformational power of the Gospel (v. 29-34).

1. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the salvation of the Gospel (v. 12-19)

Reductio ad Absurdum is a form of argument that attempts to disprove a statement by showing it inevitably leads to a ridiculous, absurd, or impractical conclusion. *Reductio* arguments are when a person grabs onto an idea and carries it to its logical extension. Here is an example today. If the world is flat, why don't ships fall off its edge? See how it has an idea and then the crazy conclusion that would be true if the idea were true. I lived a constant confusion when I was an Atheist. As an Evolutionist, I believed we are all cosmic accidents. I thought there was no need for God and that we are the random chance existence of a higher evolved animal. At the same time, I got offended when people stole from me or did wrong things to me. I would think that the thing they are doing is wrong. But then I would ask myself, "Is there anything that is really wrong? Why do I have this sense of right and wrong, if I am just an accident? Where do those thoughts come from?" I would try to be what I considered a good person, but whenever I wanted, I would just break the rules. I have lived as both as a Christian and an Atheist, and atheism personally made me miserable. I could do whatever I wanted, but in the end, all my freedom and selfishness were killing me. God, on the other hand, has never disappointed me. When I questioned myself, I was questioning the logic of my morality. When someone shows you the illogical or absurd effects of your idea, they have used *Reductio ad Absurdum*. This sermon today is not a philosophy lesson. I bring this up because Paul uses *Reductio ad Absurdum* six times in these first seven verses.

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

- A. If Christ did not rise from the dead, our preaching is in vain.
- B. If Christ did not rise from the dead, your faith is in vain.
- C. If Christ did not rise from the dead, we are misrepresenting God.
- D. If Christ did not rise from the dead, you are still in your sins.
- E. If Christ did not rise from the dead, the Christians who have died have perished.
- F. If Christ did not rise from the dead, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Ideas have power. Either Jesus rose from the dead, or he did not. Either he is God, or he is not. Either we will live forever, or we will not. Either Christ is with us always, or he is not. Either Christ is

the Lord of the Church, or he is not. Either Christianity is true, or it is not. Paul does not see a kind of Christianity where you can sort of be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection.

One day some Mormons came to my door in Guatemala. I knew what they believed, and I asked them about their lives and invited them to sit and share whatever message they had. They started by telling me that after all the Apostles died, the true church disappeared, and it was not until the Mormon church was born in the United States that God restored his church. I asked them a few questions. First, I asked her, "If the true church disappeared, that means that all the people of the world were lost from 100AD until the mid-1850s. Is that what you are saying?" Second, "If that is what you believe, why did Jesus say in Matthew 16:18 that he will build his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it? Do you believe Jesus?" That led to them coming for seven weeks, bringing other people, and in the end, they could not ever answer my question. They would try to change the subject, but I would not let them. Either Jesus built a Church that will last in some way or shape until he comes, or he did not. We prayed for God to break through, and after seven weeks, the American Mormon missionary quit and went home. We do not know what happened to her. But this is a story about how bad ideas hurt people. They enslave people. They can even eternally destroy people. What about you? Maybe there are some ideas you have that you need to abandon. Why do you do what you do? It would be very helpful to you to take some time and think as to why you are doing what you are doing.

2. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the story of the Gospel (v. 20-28)

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Here is the story. Adam sinned and brought death on us all. Jesus died and rose to make it right. His resurrection was the first of many to come, just like the fruit tree has a first fruit. He will build his kingdom and then return to earth to resurrect the dead and to demolish death. Then will come a new heaven and new earth with justice and love. There is a purpose for everything, and God is going to make everything perfect.

Recently we were driving, and I saw the most incredible rainbow I have ever seen. The colors were so bright and clear. My family was with me, and my kids were saying, "Where, where? We don't see it!" "Right there!" I told them. I was shocked. I need to get those guys an eye exam, I thought. Then all of a sudden it occurred to me, "I am wearing sunglasses". As I removed the glasses, the rainbow almost disappeared. They laughed at me. It reminded me of a C.S. Lewis quote, *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see*

everything else.” Social Scientists, Philosophers, and Theologians call this a worldview. I do not have time to give a long explanation of what a worldview is. But in general, it is a set of assumptions, ideas, or beliefs that you have that color the way you see everything else. It is like my sunglasses. It is your best answer to life’s hardest questions. Everybody has a worldview. Philosophers point out that the concept of worldview is a more accurate than the word religion. Atheists will say they do not have a religion, but they must answer the same questions that humans have asked since the beginning. This is a helpful way to point out that the bad idea I once held that there is no God has bad consequences. Every worldview requires faith.

Question	Christian	Atheist
<i>ORIGEN: Where did humans come from?</i>	God made men in his image. We are relational creative intelligent artists.	We are cosmic accidents.
<i>MEANING: Why do we exist?</i>	We were made for a relationship with God.	There is no meaning in life. You decide what it means for you.
<i>MORALITY: What is right and wrong?</i>	God determines and empowers us to know and do his will.	There is no right and wrong. It is all made up.
<i>EVIL: Why are things broken and wrong?</i>	Adam sinned and so all his children suffer for it. But in Jesus there is hope and a future.	There is no reason.
<i>DESTINY: What will happen when we die?</i>	You will live forever with God in a perfect world that his son paid for on the cross and resurrected to show us what was going to happen.	You will stop existing and just turn into dirt.

3. Denying the resurrection of Jesus affects the transformational power of the Gospel (v. 29-34)

²⁹ Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? ³⁰ Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” ³³ Do not be deceived:

“Bad company ruins good morals.”³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

In this last section of the text, we see that Paul addresses some of the practical questions that are connected to believing in the resurrection and gives them an exhortation to wake up. I believe that being baptized on behalf of the dead is a strange phrase, and it has caused much confusion. I may be wrong, but I have a pretty simple way of understanding it. I believe he is speaking of the symbolism of baptism. Baptism symbolizes a person going into the grave and rising with Jesus. What I believe verse 29 means is that if there is no such thing as resurrection, why does baptism symbolize dying and rising with Christ? Surely the Corinthians knew the symbolism of baptism, and they surely understood that denying the resurrection while having baptisms showing resurrection makes no sense.

Next, he mentions how he consistently puts himself in physical danger for the sake of the Gospel. If there is no life after death and no resurrection, why would it make sense for Christians to risk their lives for the Gospel? The history of the Christian Church is filled with martyrs who have constantly said that believing in the resurrection of Jesus would give them the strength to face death. Resurrection implies many other things, like the final judgment of believers and unbelievers, that life exists after death and that God has a plan for the healing of our broken world. Without this understanding, life would have a different meaning. Many people believe that this is the only life they will live and therefore they might as well party and enjoy all kinds of sin. I purposefully said it that way. I said they BELIEVE that this is the only life they will live, because everyone has faith. Some believe there is no life after this one, and others believe there is. The Apostle Paul is teaching that the bad Christians have been heavily influenced by the unbelievers around them, and he warns them very seriously not to be deceived by their culture. The bad influences and ideas around you are corrupting your good beliefs and morals. The Corinthians are acting like drunk men who have passed out on the street. Are you asleep? Wake up, my dear brothers. Wake up. God is calling for the spiritually broken to trust him and his words. He can change any of us, but the change must begin with the mind. The battle for our world is a battle for the mind. If we deny the core pieces of God's word, we are, in fact, hurting ourselves.

Discussion questions:

- 1.** Have you ever changed your mind about something and had that change your life in a big or small way? (For example, thoughts about God, your work, your relationships, your parenting.)
- 2.** How do you feel about the word theology or doctrine? Fear? Boredom? Why is doctrine important?
- 3.** The Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, teaches the Pastor Timothy to preach the word. Why do you think God wants his word preached in church, instead just saying whatever we want to or entertaining people?
- 4.** According to 1 Corinthians 15:12-34, why is resurrection important?

5. What does the chart that shows the difference between Christians and Atheists make you think?
6. What do you think are the teachings of the Bible that people most struggle with within our culture? Do they struggle with those same things everywhere?
7. What did God speak to you through this sermon?