

## IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and three days later he rose again. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

The first writer about the resurrection was St Paul. His writings have full apostolic authority for Christians. They are considered to be co-authored by God and therefore without error.

Paul devoted 1 Corinthians 15 to showing that Jesus really rose from the dead to refute the Christian heretics who were saying that resurrections don't happen.

The Bible contains the teachings of the apostles who were reportedly inspired by God to convey divine truth to the world. The Bible claims not only to record the teaching received from God but to itself be the book that God wrote. There is no point in getting divine revelation second-hand. The book that records it needs to be divinely revealed too.

Paul writes that Jesus made a number of appearances and appeared to him last as if he were an *ektroma* an aborted fetus or a miscarriage. That is best understood as Paul saying that the others had the best experiences while his own as wonderful as it was was a pittance in comparison. The book of Acts says that when Paul saw Jesus he only saw a light and heard a voice. This means that the only eyewitness account we have fails to be evidence that Jesus rose.

Paul the apostle wrote in the Bible "If Christ hasn't been raised from the dead then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. Then those who have died in Christ are lost. If we only have hope in Christ for this life then we are to be pitied above all men" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). The problem was that the believers in Corinth were denying or doubting that the story that Jesus rose from the dead is true.

Some think that he is saying that if Jesus hasn't risen that he implies that Christianity must make things harder for people and have a standard of goodness that is dependant not on commonsense but on revelation and which must be very painful to follow. Otherwise they would not be the stupidest people alive.

The context is about sin and being lost from God forever and that we are to be pitied if we only enjoy our faith in this life. That interpretation is wrong though Paul would agree that Christians are sad if they are deluded for it is one tough demanding faith.

In Paul's thought, if the faith is wrong you are better off without the standard of morality revealed by Christ in spite of the joy of being a Christian. Paul rejects the heretical view of the modern Church that if Christianity is wrong we are still better off having followed it for it made us good and happy. This shows that the pleasure-loving Jesus of the gospels who offered all humanity a light burden that would be good for them is rejected as inauthentic. He is a fiction.

Paul implies that even if you love God with all your heart as a result of faith in Christ this is awful if Christ is a fraud or if the resurrection of Christ is a fiction.

He said that if Jesus is not alive now then Christians are to be pitied above all people (v19). But if Jesus is dead and Christians are inspired to be caring and are happy thinking he is alive then how could Paul say that? How could Paul say that if Jesus is not the risen Son of God then all is lost and we are still in our sins and should despair?

1 One answer is that the Christians had all been staking everything on expecting the risen Jesus to soon come back for them so if this is wrong their suffering and sacrifice would be proven fruitless. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul

certainly made it clear that lives must be turned upside down in preparation for his coming. Paul must have claimed that he had a revelation that Jesus was on his way for he could not have them go that far over speculation. When that revelation was wrong what about the one when he saw Jesus on the way to Damascus in a flash of light from Heaven?

Some say, "The answer ignores the fact that Paul says we are still in our sins if Jesus has not risen. There is no reason to link it to the second coming." But what if the reason for worrying about sin is that it will mean we are not ready when Jesus returns.

It is said, that the Christians in Corinth despite their sacrifices were happy so answer one can be dismissed. They were not happy. Paul had a lot of trouble looking after their spiritual health. Happiness if they had it came at a big price so Paul makes sense.

Christianity is a false religion if the resurrection was promoted for this reason for Jesus has not come back. He would have to return within a decade or two after Paul wrote that. The resurrection and a rapid return of Jesus are too tied together.

2 Another answer that could be added to this one or taken alone is that Paul believed that human beings were worthless and their works futile unless God had cleansed them from their sins and saved them so if Jesus has not risen there is no forgiveness. We know Paul taught that humans were totally useless without the work of God's grace to make them good and forgive them.

Answer two just means that you are totally sinful and need a saviour to take away your sins and pay the price to God for them. But if the saviour wasn't Jesus why can't one hope it was somebody else? God would provide a saviour if necessary.

There could have been a saviour who saved the world and who rose but who never appeared to anybody or who is perhaps appearing in India.

One wonders how Paul could teach that if Jesus was not the saviour then nobody could be the saviour. Christians say that he meant there was nobody as holy and powerful with miracle working as Jesus so nobody could be his match or do better. And so if Jesus was a fraud there will be no saviour. Paul gave no indication of reasoning this way at all.

The reasoning is absurd. Somebody more powerful could come along. The reasoning is arrogant.

Human uselessness and the need for a saviour and for one who comes back from the dead could all be true even if Jesus was a fraud. In that light, Paul was going too far in painting a hellish picture should Jesus turn out to have been a fraud. It could follow that maybe some unknown person is the saviour. Paul was really trying to scare people into accepting Jesus and to make them suffer despair if they fail to.

3 Another answer in the same category is that Paul was just being silly. When Paul could not handle a serious heresy adequately despite his expertise as an evangelist it shows that his converts were gullible and that he had no concern for the purity of the truth and was not an apostle and was too unsuitable so Jesus did not choose him on the way to Damascus which was a hallucination.

If Jesus died for sinners as he said then sin is dealt with and Jesus doesn't have to rise until the end of the world if he wants to. Why is it so vital that Jesus must have risen before Paul's ministry? The timing is interesting. It implies that there can be no salvation for anybody until Jesus rises first. Paul believed that some by special revelation in the Old Testament were saved. The resurrection must have happened in ancient times!

The correct answer is probably that Paul was saying that he couldn't be wrong about the resurrection and was so sure that if Jesus wasn't the saviour nobody was because Paul cannot be wrong! It was then not faith in the resurrection at all that Paul wanted. It was really faith in Paul. This shows that Paul had to base the religion on his own personality and not on Jesus either because Jesus wasn't interesting when he was a man or nobody knew anything about him as a man for he lived centuries before.

If Jesus did miracles and proved he was the Son of God before his crucifixion and was still dead there would still be hope of a return. Christians say there wouldn't be if Jesus had promised to rise on the third day and failed to. Even if he did rise later the failed promise would prove he was not the saviour or Son of God after all. They say Paul knew that and had that at the back of his mind. But had Paul meant that he would have said so. But if Jesus promised to rise in three days and didn't there is the possibility that the apostles who would have heard of this promise had they lived with him were mistaken or tricked by Satan. He will actually rise later in the future. We can reject what the Christians would say.

However, if Jesus had done miracles when alive even that would prove that there is a supernatural power and make it possible that somebody else could die for us and save us by the miracle of rising again. All would not be lost and we could hope for somebody else. The way Paul makes it a total catastrophe if Jesus hasn't risen suggests that this thinking is wrong. Therefore the resurrection was the first known miracle of Jesus. The gospels lied when they said Jesus did miracles before his crucifixion.

When Paul had to remind the heretics that Adam was made from clay and so raising the dead from dust was possible they were not experts in theology or exceptionally well-instructed in religion. He meant something simple – something they could understand. He meant therefore that to say that all was lost if Jesus is dead at face value. It was a dogma.

Paul said that even if you sincerely but wrongly believe Jesus rose you are to be pitied and you are still in your sins. In saying that, Paul eliminates sincerity as sufficient for salvation so even the resurrection is useless without appearances in which Jesus will convey the gospel. You need to know the gospel to be saved. Orthodoxy is necessary. When Paul says that all is lost if Jesus has not been raised he means that the resurrection is necessary for the appearances and appearances for the gospel to be taught and the gospel is the only way to salvation so if there is no resurrection there is no salvation.

He meant that the resurrection alone would have been a claim to fame for Jesus. This would imply Jesus lived an ordinary life or that nobody knows what kind of life he had. According to Paul, if Jesus has not risen and appeared there is no saviour and we are lost. He never actually says that it is because the end of the world is coming soon according to the Old Testament prophets and the signs of the times. Some say that to Paul, if Jesus were not the saviour nobody was for no one would come now to save us for time was running out.

For Paul, if Jesus is still dead there is no reason to hope that he will rise and be the saviour meaning Paul saw nothing unusual or interesting, or perhaps that could be known, about Jesus' historical life.

Paul wrote that the dead are lost forever if Jesus never rose from the dead - which is an illogical argument. It is also religious emotional blackmail. There is no moral compass with anybody who does this. Can you imagine how much pain and suffering a lot of his disciples in Corinth endured when their loved ones got sick and died and were slain by robbers in those shocking times? Paul's blackmail led to the harassment and abuse of those who decided that after dallying with the religion and committing to it left it. There is a clear attempt to make them feel utter despair.

Paul's saying the dead are lost if Jesus did not rise is like saying, "My wife will come back to me because I don't want to be old and alone". What you want or need isn't going to make any difference. It is trying to blackmail his hearers to believe. You only use fear as a weapon in this way when you suspect your visions are hallucinations or when you are lying. The apostles in Jerusalem must have been as bad as him. They all pulled together when it came to defending the alleged resurrection. The rest of the Church and its heads Peter, John and James must be assumed to have approved of this stance as well. It shows the early Church was a cult.

Some say that the standard doctrine was that everybody would rise one day and Jesus is part of that resurrection but just happened to be done first. So Jesus was a part of the general final resurrection meaning that if he did not rise the dead will not rise in general. This is not logical. And also, exceptions proving the rule is nonsense. The exception is not an exception but a rule in conflict with the general rule. An individual case and that is not of general reference is just an individual case. Being individual has nothing to do with it being an exception.

Jesus might not rise but that does not refute a general resurrection. He might rise with everybody else. Paul is more interested in the when of Jesus rising not the rising. This is about his and the apostles using the miracle story to make themselves look important.

In his next letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul wrote "If someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:4). Paul said very little about Jesus and talked all the time as if only the death of Jesus and his resurrection mattered. It is likely then that the other Jesus was the Jesus of those who did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the best assumption because we have some evidence for it. We know that in Corinth some who claimed to be in the Church were denying that Jesus rose. "If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (1 Corinthians 15:12,13). The claim that they believed in Christ's resurrection only is absurd. He makes it plain they were denying that anybody rises including Jesus. He bases the evidence for the resurrection on preaching. He says that is enough to justify believing in it. Had they believed in the resurrection of Jesus he would have written, "If [you hold] that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

## Conclusion

Paul's treatment of the case for the resurrection of Jesus shows he was on thin ice theologically and historically. There are alleged miracles outside of Christianity that have better evidence than that.

Conspiracies and the Cross, Timothy Paul Jones, Front Line, A Strang Company, Florida, 2008  
The Jesus Inquest, Charles Foster, Monarch Books, Oxford, 2006