

**PREFACE**

Why do we study God's word? Why do we worship God and seek His perspective on all things? Why is it important that we think rightly about God and the gospel of Christ? Why do we bother with such things?

As the apostle Paul wraps up his thoughts for this middle section of Chapter Fifteen, he reminds the Corinthians—and us—that what we believe affects how we live. This business of the resurrection of believers is not just some intellectual exercise with no bearing or influence on daily life. No, in these last three verses Paul will make clear that *not* believing in resurrection will color many of our life-decisions—more often than not, leading us into bad company and bad habits. And the root of this is, as Jesus put it to the Sadducees, that we “do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God” ([Mark 12:24](#)). Many of us today do indeed believe that there will be a future resurrection for everyone, but I dare say that few of us grasp the true *immensity* of that fact, as well as the influence it has on our lives this side of the resurrection.

In addition, these three verses shed an important light on much of the errant behavior going on in the Corinth church. Since Chapter One of this letter we have watched as the apostle has addressed so many shortcomings and instances of downright abhorrent behavior in the church body, and we have struggled to understand how supposed Christians could behave in such a manner. These three verses reveal much of the “why” behind that behavior.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:30-34.**

v32

*If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?  
If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE  
DIE.*

In our last session I agreed with other commentators that Paul could have made his point (and more succinctly) by leaving out v31 and v32a, which would have then been rendered “Why indeed do we ourselves face dangers every hour? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Fee). I went on to conclude, however, that Paul must have had his reasons for bringing the Corinthians—and his regard for them—into the discussion. Today we discover that reason.

*If...I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus,*

It is thought by most scholars that the apostle wrote this letter to the Corinth church while he was in Ephesus. It is also thought by most scholars that if Paul had indeed done battle with wild beasts in Ephesus that he would not have survived to write v32. He is not tacking this on to his list of actual persecutions and tribulations suffered while serving Christ—suggesting he has stood in the arena against ravening beasts, and somehow survived. He is speaking, at least, metaphorically, referring to the strong opposition he is experiencing in Ephesus (Fee, Garland), to which he refers in the next chapter.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.**

It is also possible, I would contend, that more emphasis can be placed on the leading “If,” which might be rendered, *Even if I fought with beasts...what does it profit me?* This first sentence of the verse is a strong, punchy coda to what he said in v30 and v31: “Why are we also in danger every hour?” and “...I die daily.” From the literal to the hyperbolic: the first two speak of actual suffering and challenges on the road, while the third may be a bit of hyperbole to drive home his point.

Whatever is behind Paul’s use of this phrase, it was a common metaphor in secular literature of the time, and stems from the use of wild beasts in the arena to torture and kill. Interestingly, “in Jewish legend, the willingness to sacrifice one’s life in the arena for God is evidence of faith in the resurrection” (Garland). The entire Chapter Seven in the apocryphal Second Maccabees tells the story of a family of seven brothers and their mother who were tortured and killed for their faith. It opens, “It came to pass also, that seven brethren with their mother were taken, and compelled by the king against the law to taste swine’s flesh, and were tormented with scourges and whips.” It goes on in rather gruesome detail to record the horrible torture of the brothers—which I will spare you. But for our purpose let me lift out a few of the dying words of the brothers:

And when he was at the last gasp, he said, Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life. (2Ma 7:9)

After him was the third made a mocking stock: and when he was required, he put out his tongue, and that right soon, holding forth his hands manfully. And said courageously, These I had from heaven; and for his laws I despise them; and from him I hope to receive them again. (2Ma 7:10-11)

Now when this man was dead also, they tormented and mangled the fourth in like manner. So when he was ready to die he said thus, It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him: as for thee, thou shalt have no resurrection to life. (2Ma 7:13-14)

It was the hope of resurrection that gave these men and their mother the strength and courage to suffer so for their God. As David Garland pithily writes, “Resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means a hopeless end.”

*...what does it profit me?*

What’s the point of it all? Why go to all this bother? Why collect so many scars and so often risk my life if there is no resurrection? Why should Christians suffer and die, as they do daily, for the amusement of the profane mob if there is no hope for the future?

*If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.*

If there is no resurrection, we may as well just party hearty, since our grave will indeed be our *final* resting place.

*If from human motives...*

But what does Paul mean by the phrase that begins this verse? The evidence we have looked at thus far provides us the manner in which we are to understand this. The NASB in this instance is not helpful; the NIV2011, with “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus **with no more than human hopes**” takes liberties, of course, but takes us in the right direction; the KJVs are best, with “If, **in the manner of men**, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus” (emphasis added). In the Greek it is *kata anthropon*, which can mean “Like men, for applause, money, etc.” (Robertson), or “As men ordinarily do, for temporal reward; and not under the influence of any higher principle or hope” (Vincent). But the context of this verse and paragraph would suggest that Paul is referring to the shortsightedness of “mere men”—that is, men with a strictly earthbound perspective. If that sounds familiar, it is because Paul has used the term before in this letter.

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.** (v3: “mere men” = *kata anthropon*)

How ironic that Paul would accuse the Corinthians, of all people, of being “mere men,” “men of flesh”—that is, men who are *not* spiritual. These are the ones whose behavior regarding marriage and sex and meat sacrificed to idols was so bizarre (for supposed Christians) based on their self-perception of superior spirituality!

J. Hering employs the idea and imagery of a horizon. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, *If my horizon were limited to earthly perception, the shortsighted vision of mere men, on a merely human level, what would be the point of suffering so for the name of Christ? It would be utterly wasted and futile. But my horizon is boundless, ending only in an eternity with my Savior and Lord. With all that in my mind I can suffer ridicule, physical danger, stones and beatings, yes even wild beasts and death, because, just like Christ Himself, one day I will be bodily raised from the dead to enjoy His presence forever.*

*Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”*

Paul cites an ancient epigram to splash cold water on the errant Corinthians. Since v29 he has been employing the rhetorical device of *argumentum ad absurdum* (the form of argument that attempts to establish a claim by showing that the opposite scenario would lead to absurdity or contradiction) to convince the church of the absurdity of their position that there is no resurrection. For Paul, it is now time to put away the rhetoric and go for the jugular.

This will make the third time Paul has exclaimed, “Do not be deceived!” And the use of the epigram makes his point clearly: *Quit hanging around and listening to the wrong people! We have seen the evidence for this right from Chapter One of this letter; so many in the church have been listening to the philosophies and mimicking the practices of the fallen society in which they dwell, and it is corrupting their faith and their relationship with Christ.*

The KJV translates this verse, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” This is because the word translated “company” in our other versions (*homilia*) can mean either companionship or conversation—which makes sense, since we typically converse with those whose company we keep. And actually it seems apropos: it isn’t the physical proximity to the unsaved that necessarily corrupts our theology and habits, but giving credence to what they are saying—hence, what they believe to be true. If you hang around long enough with people who deny the resurrection of the dead, you’ll eventually start agreeing with them.

*Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

Again, remember that Paul is writing to a group of *believers*—he refers to them as those “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1:2) and “brethren” (1:10)—who consider themselves to be so highly “spiritual,” so wise that they

- wink at incest taking place in the body,
- take their brother Christians to court,
- eat food sacrificed to pagan idols,
- frequent temple prostitutes while abstaining from relations with their spouse,
- selfishly hoard their expensive food at church love feasts,
- shame others in the church,
- and get drunk at Communion.

The KJVs, while not at all inaccurate, soften this with “Awake to righteousness,” while the NIVs, (again not inaccurate, but as the NIVs often do, speaks of the *result* of the text rather than the text itself) make it “Come back to your senses.” The ESV, while *sounding* like a paraphrase is really the best translation in my opinion, with “Wake up from your drunken stupor.” *Eknepsate* means to become sober, sleep off a drunken fit; *dikaïos* means rightly, that which is correct, the right thing to do.

*...and stop sinning*

The verb *hamartanete me* is present, active, imperative; that is, *stop doing what you are already doing!*

*for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

It is remotely possible that when the apostle states that “*some* have no knowledge of God” he is referring to the world outside of the church, but it is far more probable that he is pointing his finger at those leaders in the church who are “taking this church down its present disastrous course. Those who are leading others into a new understanding of *pneuma*, *sophia* and *gnosis* (spirit, wisdom, and knowledge) are here said to be, as the pagan world that surrounds them, people who are altogether ‘ignorant of God’” (Fee).

In their disputes with Paul they have claimed to be in possession of a special spiritual knowledge; here Paul calls them out on that. This is a damning statement that should have elicited from every member of the Corinth church a deep, humbling self-evaluation. [Let’s close by reading from Mark’s gospel a passage referenced at the beginning of this session.](#) One day some Sadducees quizzed Jesus with a ridiculous, hypothetical situation about a woman being married to a string of seven brothers. Because Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, they were attempting to trick Jesus.

**Read Mark 12:23-27.**

These were religious leaders in the Jewish community, yet Jesus rightly points out their ignorance. He nails them with “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God... Have you not read in the book of Moses...? ...you are greatly mistaken.”

It was to their shame that the Corinthians were so ignorant of God and His ways. That being the case, what’s *our* excuse? Like them, we have the Spirit of God living within—but we have His complete written word at our fingertips—in multiple versions and just about every known language. We are to stop listening to the Siren Song of this fallen world and learn—learn fully and deeply—the eternal truth from above.