

Both And!
1 Corinthians 15: 12-19

1 Cor 15:19

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ESV

If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else. Contemporary English Version

And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. New Living Translation

1 Canfield 1:1

The only thing worse than not believing that Jesus has risen from the dead for our sake is believing that He will be the only One raised.

That was the problem with the early church at Corinth to which Paul wrote those words. They claimed to believe in Christ's resurrection, but some among them had trouble believing they could or would follow in His footsteps. There were many reasons for that misconception. Perhaps some were still influenced by the false teaching of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were more of a political party than a religious movement of the day, and they did not believe in a bodily resurrection. They taught that life and religion was for the here and now rather than the there and later. In their eyes, the Scriptures were an optional guide for living life in the present. The historian Josephus described them this way: "The Sadducees take away fate entirely and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; that to do what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs to everyone, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. It led to the common belief that everything physical, including the human body was evil, and the idea of an evil body being resurrected after death to live again was unthinkable. It didn't matter what evil the physical body did because the spiritual part of the body was considered completely separate and good, and only that part of the body could live in eternity.

Still others in Corinth were under the influence of the teaching of the Pharisees, the religious leaders and hypocrites of the day. Trying to follow all their rules and regulations left little hope that a holy God could love a sinful person like themselves, let alone spend eternity with them. Though they believed there was an afterlife in heaven, they thought they would never be good enough to make it there.

Can you imagine how those teachings would have influenced the pop culture of the day? One group said forget about the rules, and the other said there are never enough. Without the hope of resurrection, without the hope of life after death, without the justice of final judgement, life was to be lived for the present, rather than for the future. Does that sound vaguely familiar? Is there any doubt that little has changed in two thousand years since Jesus raised Himself from the dead?

The Sadducees are still with us, propagating the misguided notion that in the end everyone will be in heaven. The Pharisees are also alive and well today, imposing their version of holiness upon the church. Good Christians do this and are supposed to do that, while bad Christians do that and don't do this. Obviously, some rules are necessary. They help us to grow in our faith (think of John Wesley), and they remind us of our fallen nature and our need for a redeemer- a rescuer- a resurrector. I don't know if that is a word or not but that is what Jesus is- a resurrector. He raises us up to Him.

James reminds us that faith without works is dead, and the apostle Paul tells us that faith without hope is vain and empty. 15:12-14. The only thing worse than not believing that Jesus has risen from the dead for our sake is believing that He will be the only One raised.

Praise God that because of the resurrection we are neither Pharisees nor Sadducees, but Christians. It is much too easy to forget that we are "both and" Easter people. We are living for the "here and now" and the "there and later". The "there and later" makes the "here and now" bearable on those days when life seems hopeless and out of control, especially during those difficult times when we may hear that heavenly voice that gently whispers, "not now".

Nearly 600 years before Jesus' resurrection, God's people were living without hope, seemingly cut off from His grace. They were a divided nation, caught up in false teaching and idolatrous living. Then, perhaps in a place much like this, the Lord asked the prophet Ezekiel this question: Son of man, can these dry bones live? The answer is yes. Ezekiel 37:11-14. Can these dry bones live? Yes, they can and someday they will. Jesus proved it possible by His own death and resurrection.

We are Easter people- we are optimists rather than pessimists (most of the time). We know that because of His resurrection Christ has conquered evil and the power of death to destroy our hope. Our challenge is to live our lives like we believe that, as we anticipate and anxiously await the promise of own resurrection someday.

How good it is to be part of God's people, Easter people, resurrection people, Jesus people. Sometimes we need to be reminded of that holy truth. Lord, as we celebrate your resurrection and anticipate our own, thank you for drawing us nearer to you. We love You and pray that all of creation will do the same. Amen