

**1 Corinthians 15: 12-20; "And if Christ is not Risen", A Sermon for  
Easter Sunday, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010,  
In the Morning Worship Service.**

There was a problem in the church at Corinth. It was a problem that the Apostle Paul knew that he needed to address. The problem was; that there were some among them who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It was an amazing thing, which shows us the blindness of the human heart; that sometimes even Christian people cannot draw the right conclusions concerning the truth of the doctrines which make up the gospel itself. They say that they believe in the gospel; and perhaps they really do; but yet they do not understand the implications of what they have believed. When we consider those people who are outside of Christ; unbelieving people in general; we think that we can understand why they might think that it is an incredible thing that God should be able to raise the dead. But the Apostle Paul even questioned this, when he was speaking before King Agrippa and Bernice his wife, and the governor Festus in Acts 26, verse 8. He said to them, "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?" He was saying to those who were unbelievers, that they should not think it incredible. When you understand that unbelievers do not think enough about God's ability and His purpose to someday raise all of the dead; you can see why Paul so often preached to them about it. But that a believer should hold that false doctrine, that God will not raise the dead, when it is so clearly revealed in the Scriptures; that is something astonishing indeed. It showed the Apostle Paul that more instruction to the church at Corinth was needed on this great subject. And he was not reluctant to give it to them. And so here in Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, we find him giving some very good instruction to them; instruction that I would also set before you this morning before we observe the Lord's Supper.

The way that he gave them this instruction; the way that Paul and the Holy Spirit thought that the truth on this subject should be imparted, was by his using logical deduction and the use of syllogism. God, in the preaching of His holy word, does use logic. We have a very reasonable God and we have a very reasonable faith. In the logical deduction which Paul used in his preaching, if there was one thing which was stated by him which was true; then there were other truths which could be deduced from that one statement of truth. In this particular passage I believe that I can find Paul using syllogisms. A syllogism is a form of reasoning and argumentation which consists in the putting forth of three propositions of truth. The first two are called the Premises, and the last is called the Conclusion. In a syllogism, the Conclusion necessarily follows from the Premises; so that if the first two propositions are true, which Paul declares that they are; then the conclusion must also be true, and the argument then, amounts to a demonstration

which cannot be proved false. Just so you might understand this, in a simplified form, let me give you an objective example. Let us say that as the first proposition of a syllogism, that we make a statement that a plant does not have the power to walk. Then we assert by way of the second proposition that an oak tree is a plant. Therefore we can conclude in our third proposition that an oak tree does not have the power of walking. That is a syllogism. I hope that you can grasp this. The first and second propositions are called the Major and the Minor. And what follows from them is called the Conclusion. There are 3 syllogisms which are given to us here in these verses by Paul, and they will form the heads of my sermon to you this morning. The first syllogism Paul uses is related to the preaching of Christ as being raised from the dead. (Verses 12 and 13) The second syllogism is related to the fearful thought that Christ might not be raised from the dead. (Verses 14-17) And the third syllogism centers around the truth that Christ most certainly has been raised from the dead. (Verses 17-20) Follow me now, and let your faith in the resurrection of Christ be strengthened by the strong reasoning and logic of the Apostle Paul. As we will come to the Lord's table in a few minutes, we will remember the love of God in giving us His Son whom He did raise from the dead. We will remember the power of God which raised Him from the dead is the same power which is at work in our hearts and our lives.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> of the syllogisms used here by Paul in these verses concerns the Preaching of Christ as raised from the dead.** (Verses 12 and 13)

He says in verse 12 – "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" "But if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ is not risen." So our first proposition, or the Major of our syllogism, is that Christ had been preached to them as raised from the dead. The Minor of our syllogism is that there were those who said that there was not a resurrection of the dead, even after they had heard the gospel. Therefore the conclusion must be, that if there is no resurrection from the dead, that Christ was not risen. The Christ of the gospel, who every true Christian holds to and proclaims, whether it was in that day, or whether it is in this; is not only Jesus Christ crucified, and Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins; but also Jesus Christ raised from the dead. If you look back up the page, to verse 1 of Chapter 15, you will find these words: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain." "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead must not be left out of the gospel. For it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that proves that Christ's work on the cross, in dying for our sins, was accepted by God the Father. It was Christ's taking the place of the sinner, there at the cross, that secured the forgiveness of all the sins of all of God's precious people. But it was the resurrection of Christ which showed all men

that God was satisfied with Christ in the whole area of His justice and judgment upon our sins. Indeed, because Christ is the One and the only One who died for our sins and rose again, it is He who will be the judge of all men on the Day of Judgment. Romans Chapter 14, verse 9 says, "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." How could Christ ever possibly be the judge of the living and dead on the last Day when He returns, if the dead are not raised. It is ludicrous! But because He lives forevermore, because He rose from the dead; He shall indeed also raise all the dead and summon them to judgment. It is therefore Christ's being raised from the dead that establishes the truth that you and I ought to repent of all of our sins.

In Acts Chapter 17, verse 29, it says, "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." "He has furnished proof (He has given assurance) of this to all by raising Him from the dead." In other words, God has most certainly and definitely appointed Jesus to be the judge of the living and the dead. And the proof of His doing this is that He raised Jesus from the dead. He raised Him from the dead to declare Him to be the Son of God; and that, with power. Romans Chapter 1, and verses 1-4 says, "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Jesus is by His resurrection declared to be the Son of God with power, and this is according to the Spirit of holiness. Jesus is the first-born among many brethren. If He has been raised from the dead, then we also shall be raised from the dead because of His position and power to make us over into His own blessed image. Because He was raised in His same body; only glorified; we also shall be raised someday when He returns, in our same body; only glorified. But according to Paul's use of logic and syllogism here; when a person says that there is no resurrection of the dead, they are actually saying, therefore, that Christ Himself has not been raised.

Let me ask you this morning if you believe in the resurrection of the dead? For if you do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, I say to you on the authority of the Bible, that you do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if you do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then it is possible that you may question many more of the central truths of the gospel, and in the end find yourself fighting against other brethren, and contending for a lie, rather than for the truth. And in doing so, you will perish in your sins. On the other hand, when you believe in this truth you most certainly shall be saved. It says in Romans Chapter 10, and verse 9, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and

believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is just as simple as that, confessing your need of Christ, in order to have your sins forgiven; and believing in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead. Let me ask you if you can believe in the simplest of Bible Creeds? Creeds by the way, if they stick to the Bible, are very good when the truth is being questioned. Do you believe in the Apostle's Creed? In the Apostle's Creed it says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sits on the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of the saints; the forgiveness of Sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." There are three phrases mentioned in this creed which directly bear on the subject which we are discussing. The words, "on the third day He rose again from the dead." And secondly, "He shall come to judge the living and the dead." And, thirdly, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." These three are all linked together in the gospel. If I believe in Jesus, I believe in His resurrection from the dead. If I believe in Jesus, I believe that God has given all judgment to Him as the Son. The reason that He did so, is because either you believe in Jesus as your sin-bearer and Savior or you will have to face Jesus as your Judge; the One who will condemn you forever because you would not have Him to rule over you. A dead King cannot rule over anyone, but Jesus Christ is alive forevermore! A believing, faithful Christian doesn't mind the examination which Christ will make upon His life and His works on the Last Day, because he is trusting in Christ alone for the salvation of his sins. Is this you, my friend, or do you really think that there shall be no resurrection, and no judgment. The reason we come to the Lord's Table this morning, is to remind ourselves once again of all that Christ has done for us by His life and His death, and His resurrection. "Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and He was raised because of our justification." (Romans 4, verse 24) This is what we glory in this morning.

**The 2nd syllogism which Paul mentions in these verses is that of the fearful thought that Christ might not be raised from the dead.** (Verses 14-17)

Verse 14 says, "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty." "Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen." "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" The Major premise of the syllogism on these verses is that true preaching and true faith rests upon Christ's being raised from the dead. The minor premise is that some do not believe the Apostle's teaching concerning Christ's resurrection. Therefore the conclusion is inescapable; that their faith is futile, and they are still in their sins if they do not believe in Christ's

resurrection. What is it that fills all true preaching with gladness? Is it not the good news that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? Is it not the truth that Christ has overcome sin and death on the cross? Is that not the very reason why God has raised Him; highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name? Is it not the truth; that when Christ who is our life appears, that we also shall appear in glory with Him? Oh, rejoice forevermore that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! The way, however, that Paul words it in these verses is not in the positive. It is rather stated in the negative. If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is vain. What is it that makes preaching an empty thing? Is it not preaching Christ in such a way that His resurrection is never made mention of? Is it not preaching Christ in such a way that His life and power to save us from our sins, and His ability to raise us from the dead spiritually is never mentioned? Is it not an awful thing when you even think about the possibility of this; that Christ did not rise from the dead? It is too horrible a thing to contemplate; that Christ might not have been raised from the dead; that the Apostle Paul, and all preachers of the Word of God have been mistaken and deceived in regard to the basis of their hope of eternal life, and that somehow they really were mistaken; that they were really false witnesses of God because they testified of God that He raised up Jesus, whom He really did not raise up? Oh, what a fearful thought this is! That all our work of faith is futile, that all of our labor of love for Christ and others is meaningless; and that all of our steadfastness of hope will never make any difference at all. For if their preaching was empty and vain, then our hope is also vain. For we have believed their preaching when we believe the Bible which is its written form. These are thoughts too horrible to think about for long. Not only would the sins which we have committed before we came to know Christ not be forgiven, if Christ was not raised from the dead, but also the sins which we commit after we had come to Christ would not be forgiven and so we would never have found grace to deal with them, so that we could forsake them.

But all of our sins most certainly shall be forgiven for Jesus sake, and we most definitely will turn from them by the power of Christ, if we truly know Him. Coming to Christ for the life and power to turn from sin at every point in our life is a reality because of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ within us. Our faith is not futile. Christ is raised from the dead; and this, every true believer may prove to themselves. I want you to turn with me over to 2 Corinthians Chapter 13, verse 2. "I have told you before, and fore-tell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare—since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you but mighty in you." "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God." "For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." "Test yourselves." "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." ("Unless indeed

you fail the test", it says in the NAS) There were problems in the church of Corinth which Paul knew that he needed to address with his apostolic authority and the power given to him by Christ. There were people in the church who did not respect his authority and they were not repenting of their sins. Those sins are found listed for us in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 20 and 21. He says, "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced." He exhorted them to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. He warned them that they must repent of their sins if they were to consider themselves as true Christians. He would have them to remember the example of Christ; how He was crucified in weakness.

The Lord Jesus did not appear to the people around Him as One who was strong enough to be the King of Israel and the Lord of glory. He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. After His time of weakness upon the cross, which was for our sakes, Jesus was raised from the dead and given all authority in heaven and earth. Since these Corinthians were seeking for proof of Christ speaking in Paul, Paul says that they should remember this in terms of their listening to him and repenting of all their sins. He and the other apostles were weak in Christ; they did not seem to have any real authority to enforce a disciplinary action against an unrepentant believer. But they really did have that authority and power because they "lived" with Christ. Christ's great resurrection power was working in them, and through them, and with them to establish His will. He really had called them, and gifted them, and appointed them to this good work of kingdom building. And since the Apostles "lived" with Christ, they knew His great power, both in the proclamation of the Word, and in dealing with disobedient offenders of God's law. There were some at Corinth who claimed to be Christians, but who really wanted to defy the authority which Christ had placed over them. The ESV in verse 2b reads, "...if I come again I will not spare them, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me." "He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you." "For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God." "For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God." That is; that since Jesus Christ was, and is, raised from the dead, and seated at the right hand of the Father on high, and crowned with glory and honor, and has all power and authority, He would be able to establish Paul's apostolic authority among them, and give them every grace necessary for them to become godly people. But they must indeed repent by coming to Christ again for the power to do what was right. This is what you and I should be seeking this morning as well. There are no longer Apostles of the Lord with us in person; but it is their Word that we hold in our hands. They are no longer with us, but the Lord Jesus is present with us now as the Head of His

Church. And He is well able to discipline us where necessary, and to give us abundant grace to meet every need, so that His good and perfect will can be done. Let us come down front, now, to the Lord's table having heard these things; and let us be glad. Let us come down and remember together what it cost Him to do give us grace and His Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

**The Third and final syllogism which is given to us here to strengthen our faith is related to this truth; that Christ most certainly has been raised from the dead and has become the first fruits of them that slept.**

(Verses 17-20)

It says in verse 17, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" "Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The Major Proposition is that having Christ only for this life would be a most pitiable condition. The Minor Proposition (which is not minor at all) is that we do not have Christ only for this life, because He is raised from the dead. The Conclusion is that since Christ is risen from the dead, we are a people who should not be pitied at all; for we have everlasting life. It certainly would be pitiable if after living according to the Bible, we found it to be false when we die. But because Christ has been raised from the dead we shall find that death is not really death for us. It is the beginning of everything glorious and good. When we die, which is here called "falling asleep in Christ", we shall never perish. Jesus when he was speaking to Martha after the death of her brother Lazarus, says this to her. John 11: 23. "Your brother will rise again." "Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'" "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'" "He who believes in Me shall never die." "Do you believe this?" "She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'" You see, because of our faith in the Risen Living Christ, we are of all men, the most blessed forever because of Christ. We are not men and women to be pitied, but we are people to be marveled over; that Christ would show us this kind of mercy and love.

This is what we need to remember today. We need to remember that Christ has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will never perish; either body or soul. Instead they will become a great harvest of people who will be gathered to be a people for God's own possession on the last Day. This is what the word "firstfruits" pictures. It is referring to Christ's being the first of a great harvest of people who will be raised from the dead because He was raised from the dead. When Paul talks about, "those who have fallen asleep," he is not speaking about the sleep of the soul; for there is no sleep of the soul in death; but it is rather the sleep of the body in death that he is referring to. The soul who believes in Jesus shall never die. But the body will. And so what Christ will do when He returns, is that He will raise us up out of the ground physically and eternally to a glorious resurrection like His. The harvest

of souls takes place in this life. The harvest of bodies being joined back to those souls which have never died, takes place at the resurrection on the Last Day. This is what is being spoken of here. In Leviticus Chapter 23, verse 10, it says, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.'" "He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it." "And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord." You see, brethren, these things that are mentioned here in Leviticus are typical of Christ. The Lamb without blemish represents Christ as our sacrifice and offering to the Lord, which He has accepted, so that all of our sins would be forgiven. The Lord Jesus Christ as the high-priest of our faith offered Himself for our sins at the time of the Passover. He was crucified, He died, and was buried, and then on the third day He rose again. The third day is the day after the Jewish Sabbath that was mentioned here. It was on that day that the priest waved the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted on our behalf. This is the exact fulfillment which is recorded for us here in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, verse 20. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Christ is the firstfruits, and you who believe in Him are part of His harvest. When He rose from the dead, He as it were, was waving the sheaf of barley before the Lord. He is the firstfruits. We are the harvest. As we partake of His Supper let us remember this precious truth; that even as Jesus died and rose again, so shall we.