

The Secret to Paul's Passion

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

Introduction:

1. Nobody wants to suffer. Nobody longs to encounter persecution for their faith in Christ. Nobody desires to be martyred for their belief in Christ.
2. But as we read of the apostle Paul's life, one thing is clear. Paul wasn't going to back away from preaching the gospel out of fear.
 - Paul wasn't at all like many of the radical Muslims who will intentionally take their lives in order to kill innocent people. Hatred motivates them.
 - But Paul **was** willing to risk his life if it meant he might have the opportunity to preach the good news of Christ and see people saved. Love motivated Paul.
3. As we read our text, we learn the secret of Paul's passion and fearless zeal. Paul was not afraid of suffering and dying because of his firm belief in a future resurrection.
4. Before we dive into the text and seek to understand the mindset of Paul regarding suffering and persecution, there are a couple of sidenotes about the text.
 - First, verses 24-28 were parenthetical. Paul digressed a little bit from the subject of the resurrection in order to demonstrate that because of the resurrection God's ultimate plans and purposes will be accomplished. In verse 29, Paul begins dealing directly with the subject of the resurrection again and its ramifications.
 - Second, verse 29 is a verse that has caused many to scratch their heads. There is no record in Scripture of believers ever being baptized for their dead loved ones. It is never commanded, commended, or even mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.
 - Who was performing this ritual? We are not sure, but one thing we can be sure of: it wasn't Paul or the Corinthian church. Notice the use of the personal pronoun "they." Paul then changes to "we" in verse 30. Some have proposed that it could have been some sort of pagan or cultural ritual in that area of Greece. Ultimately, we are left to guess who Paul is referring to.
 - Here is my guess. It was a group of false teachers that were seeking to infiltrate the church with false doctrine. Paul mentions this group in verse 12. We also know that there had been an unhealthy emphasis on water baptism in this church. 1:11-17
 - Paul is bringing out the utter inconsistency of these false teachers. Why are they going through a baptismal ceremony for their dead relatives if the dead rise not? Isn't it amazing how religion will do things that makes no sense and contradicts itself?
5. Beginning in verse 30, Paul begins to get very personal and explain how the truth of the resurrection had impacted his life. Because of the truth of the resurrection:

Paul allowed himself to live in constant danger. vs. 30

1. The word "jeopardy" means to undergo peril, to be in danger.
2. Let's look at just one example of so many in the book of Acts. This story has always amazed me in **Acts 14:19-21**.

3. Paul is stoned and left for dead in Lystra on his First Missionary Journey. Paul miraculously revives, gets up, dusts himself up, and goes to Derbe. There again he preaches the gospel.
4. But look at the next phrase. He returned to Lystra where he was stoned, Iconium where there was a plot to kill him, and Antioch where he was persecuted and violently kicked out of town!
5. What was the secret to Paul's passion and boldness? Why would he allow himself to be in constant danger? He knew there was a resurrection day. He knew that even if they killed him, they could only do it temporarily.

Paul counted the gospel dearer than his own physical life. vs. 31

1. Paul knew that there was a cause bigger than himself. That cause was the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. The thought of sacrificing his life to that noble cause was not an issue for Paul. This is why Paul uses the expression, "I die daily."
 - This is not referring to "dying to self" as some misinterpret. Paul is not talking about some sort of spiritual dying to self. Paul is dealing with physical death in the context.
 - Paul is saying that every day he woke up with the realization that the preaching of the gospel could cost him his life, but that he was okay with that.
3. **Acts 20:22-24** summarizes Paul's attitude towards his life in relation to the gospel of Christ.
4. He knew that the cause of Christ was much more important than his physical life. **Acts 21:12-13**
5. It was the hope of the resurrection that gave Paul the grace to count the gospel dearer than his own life. **Acts 23:6, 24:15, 21**

Paul lived for eternity, not just today. vs. 32

1. Paul mentions fighting with beasts at Ephesus. Some have proposed that Paul may have actually been thrown into a den of wild animals and made to fight with them. This kind of thing was certainly done in Paul's day and is not beyond possibility.
2. But, as we read of Paul's time in Ephesus, it is clear that Paul encountered much opposition from enemies in Ephesus and almost lost his life. Acts 19
 - Several times, ungodly, heathen people are referred to as "beasts" in Scripture. **Titus 1:12; 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 10**
3. Paul is basically saying, "What profit or advantage could I possibly have in risking my life fighting these people if the dead rise not?"
4. If there is no resurrection, then just live for today because tomorrow you might die. Live it up, live for yourself, live for the pleasures this world can bring, and then just die like a dog.
5. Paul says, "I can't live my life that way." Why? Because there **is** a resurrection day and there **is** a future judgment on resurrection day.
6. The idea of suffering, and maybe even losing his life, was not a devastating thought for Paul. Why is this? Because Paul knew that this physical life was nothing in light of eternity. **2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Romans 8:18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8**

In Conclusion:

1. Based on the fact that there is a resurrection, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to wake up from their spiritual slumber, put away sin, and be the witnesses that God had called them to be there in Corinth. vs. 34
2. The Corinthians were being deceived by those who questioned the resurrection. These people did a lot of talking, but they didn't know God. The Corinthians were allowing these people to have a voice in the local assembly, and their false doctrine had brought about some very corrupt behavior. vs. 33
3. This is why Paul is taking so much time to address this issue of the future resurrection. He knew that this truth had greatly affected him and his thinking. He knew that it would do the same for the Corinthian church.