

Christians are Not to be Pitied in This Life

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (**I Corinthians 15:19**).

I learned something this past week as I examined this verse. I learned something about me. It wasn't pretty. But it is changing and for that I will be eternally grateful.

For years I have sprinted through this verse and just lobbed out some trite sayings about all the sacrificing we have to do as Christians but eternity makes it worth it. It is heaven that makes all that we do as Christians worth it. In fact, if it weren't for heaven, what we do as Christians would be pretty useless. In fact, we Christians are to be pitied above all men if there is no resurrection. I've said this because that is exactly how I've heard this verse taught all of my life and I just bought into it.

That says something about how I have viewed Christianity doesn't it. I've seen Christianity as a drag. It is a burden. Christianity is about keeping me from all the fun I want to have. It is about limits on excitement, fun, and pleasure. It crimps my style. It weighs me down. I will bear up under it because God has the ultimate carrot hanging out there in front of me. I want to go to heaven, not hell. Sadly, I've had the idea that living as a Christian is a pitiful existence, but hopefully heaven will surely be worth it all. If it weren't for heaven in the end, Christianity would just be pitiful.

Is that really what Paul was saying? Hang with me on this for just a moment. For the sake of argument, imagine there's no heaven, no hell below us, above us only sky. Then take a look at what the Bible says about how we should live. Is it really a pitiful existence?

When we live by the Bible, our marriages improve, our families improve, our work improves, our communities improve. Consider this. Which do you think will give a better life: A) Doing unto others as they have done unto you, B) Doing unto others before they do unto you, or C) Doing unto others as you would have done unto you? Which one is in the Bible? That's interesting. Even the atheists who now have a campaign to be good for goodness sake will likely list biblical principles as good things they ought to do for goodness sake even if they don't know the principles are found in the Bible.

Where does lying lead? Where does hate lead? Where do outbursts of wrath lead? Where does immorality lead? Where does vengeance lead? Do any of these sinful actions lead to anything positive? Has there ever been even one time when you've been involved in any of these that when it was said and done you were glad for it in the long run? Not me.

But where do honesty, love, peace, and virtue lead? While sometimes there has been immediate pain or discomfort with these, I've always been glad in the long run when I followed this path. My life is always better for it.

Galatians 5:22-23 says if we walk by the Spirit, He will bear great fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's what I want in my life. How about you? Did anybody wake up this morning and think, “Who needs love or joy in their lives? That is a pitiful way to exist”? Is anyone saying, “I wish I had a little more anxiety and unmanageability in my life. My life is so pitiful with all this peace and self-control”? Of course not. That is ridiculous. But these are blessings we get from walking by the Spirit in this life.

Considering all this, if there were no resurrection would Christians really be those most to be pitied? Of course not. Our lives would still be better than those in the world.

So what is Paul saying?

Paul is not saying that Christians in general would be most pitiable, but that the apostles in specific would be.

First, let me demonstrate that Paul is specifically talking about the apostles. In **I Corinthians 15:11**, Paul made a distinction between “we” and “you.” “We” referred to the apostles, to whom Paul had referred in **I Corinthians 15:9**. While he was least of the apostles and unworthy to be called one, he was an apostle. He was one sent by Christ into the world as His ambassador. “You” referred to the Corinthians. Thus in **I Corinthians 15:14**, when Paul said “our

preaching” he meant the preaching of the apostles and “your faith” was the faith of the Corinthians. He continued the distinction in **I Corinthians 15:15** saying that the apostles had misrepresented God because they had given false testimony. When we get to **I Corinthians 15:19**, Paul was carrying on this distinction. If there is no resurrection, the apostles, not all Christians, were of all men to be most pitied.

Second, let’s understand Paul’s real point. Why would the apostles be most pitied? Surely their lives would be even better because they were more mature in Christ. **I Corinthians 15:30-32** provides the key. The apostles were in danger every hour. Their lives were hanging by a thread. Consider the martyrdom of James in **Acts 12** and the subsequent imprisonment of Peter. Consider Jesus’ promise to Peter in **John 21:18**. If the apostles’ hope was only in this life, they were to be pitied because their lives for Christ were leading many of them to untimely deaths. As an example, Paul mentioned fighting with beasts in Ephesus. He gave a list of his daily dangers in **II Corinthians 11:23-27**. The hope Christian living gives to a person in this life doesn’t do much good for him if he is killed for living as a Christian. That is Paul’s point.

Certainly, in the midst of general persecution, this same thing might be said of all Christians. However, Paul was specifically talking about the dangers that the apostles faced. Paul was not supporting the idea that Christianity is a drag but heaven makes it worth it. The Christian life is not a drag. It is not pitiful. We are not to be pitied for living it. It is a joyful life. It provides blessing beyond compare here and now as we grow in Christ and walk by His Spirit. To top it all off, we also get heaven in the end. It just doesn’t get any better than that.