

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Analysis

- A. As Paul comes to the resurrection, the last of the problems to be discussed in the epistle, he makes known to the brethren the gospel which he preached to them (15:1-11).
1. He points out the relation of the Corinthians to this gospel (1-2).
 - a) They had received the gospel which he preached.
 - b) They were standing in this gospel.
 - c) They were being saved by it.
 - (1) The process of salvation was going on.
 - (2) Paul indicates that their being saved depended on holding fast by means of the word which he preached.
 - (3) This was true, unless they had believed in vain—some were saying there was no resurrection.
 2. He points out the basic issues of the gospel he preached (3-4).
 - a) He delivered to them as a matter of first importance that which he also received.
 - b) He indicated what these basic issues were:
 - (1) That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
 - (2) That He was buried.
 - (3) That He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.
 3. He lists the appearances of Christ in proof of His resurrection (5-8).
 - a) He appeared to Cephas.
 - b) Then to the twelve.
 - c) He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once.
 - d) Then He appeared to James.
 - e) Then to all the apostles.
 - f) Last of all, as to the child untimely born, He appeared to Paul.
 4. He gives an explanation of his apostleship which was based on Christ's appearance to him (8-11).
 - a) His last appearance was to Paul, "the child untimely born."
 - b) He was unworthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church: "I am the least of the apostles."

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- c) He shows how God's grace worked through him.
 - (1) He said, "By the grace of God I am what I am."
 - (2) God's bestowed grace was not found vain.
 - (a) He labored more abundantly than they all.
 - (b) But this was God's grace working through him.
 - d) The other apostles and Paul preached this same gospel and the Corinthians believed it.
- B. Paul explains the bearing of Christ's resurrection on the subject of the resurrection of the dead (12-34).
- 1. He bases his first argument on the assumption of the Corinthians that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead (12-19).
 - a) Question: If Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead—as Paul had just shown—how could some of them say that there was no resurrection of the dead?
 - b) Consequence of denying the resurrection: If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised.
 - c) Result of denying that Christ has been raised (14-19).
 - (1) The preaching of the apostles is vain.
 - (2) The faith of the brethren is vain.
 - (3) The apostles are found to be false witnesses of God.
 - (4) The faith of the brethren is vain and they are still in their sins.
 - (5) Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
 - (6) The apostles, who have only hoped in Christ in this life, are of all men most pitiable.
 - 2. He bases his second argument on the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead (20-23).
 - a) Christ has been raised as firstfruits of them that are dead (20-23).
 - (1) The argument of "firstfruits."
 - (2) The source of death and resurrection:
 - (a) Death came by Adam.
 - (b) Resurrection came by Christ.
 - (3) The order in which this occurs: Christ as the firstfruits, then those who are Christ's at His coming.
 - b) He shows what will occur at the end when Christ comes (24-28).
 - (1) The kingdom to be delivered to the Father.
 - (2) All enemies, including death, to be conquered.
 - (3) The Son to be subject to the Father.

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3. He bases his third argument on the relation of baptism to the resurrection (29-34).
 - a) Why be baptized if there is no resurrection (29-30)?
 - b) Why should Paul risk his life daily if there is no resurrection (31-32)?
 - c) A word that should move them to shame (33-34).
- C. Paul answers some problems involved in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (35-58).
 1. A two-fold question: How are the dead raised, and what kind of a body will they have (35-50)?
 - a) Paul answers the questions by a series of illustrations that help to understand the problems (35-41).
 - (1) A seed dies that a new plant might grow from it.
 - (2) Each kind of seed produces an appropriate plant as God pleased.
 - (3) There are various kinds of flesh, that of men, animals, birds, fish. This implies that the resurrection body will be suited to the resurrection state.
 - (4) Celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies—sun, moon, and stars—differ in glory. This implies that the resurrection body will have a glory suited to the heavenly state.
 2. An explanation of the resurrection of the dead (42-50).
 - a) Burial and resurrection are likened to sowing: perishable and imperishable; dishonor and glory; physical and spiritual.
 - b) Argument for a spiritual body: If there is a physical body, there is a spiritual one.
 - (1) Shown by comparison of Adam and Christ.
 - (2) As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall bear the image of the man of heaven.
 - c) Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; perishable cannot inherit imperishable. What then?
 3. The secret revealed (51-57).
 - a) A change will take place.
 - b) When the last trumpet sounds the dead will be raised and all will be changed.
 - c) This will mean victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 4. An exhortation to be steadfast since the resurrection will prove that the Christian's work is not in vain in the Lord (58).

*The Gospel Which Paul Preached (1-11)**Text*

15:1-11. Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, 2 by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; 5 and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; 6 then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; 7 then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Whether then it be I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

Commentary

Now I make known unto you, brethren.—Paul comes to the last of the long list of problems that had so seriously disturbed the brethren at Corinth. The problem of the resurrection was in all probability the most serious of all for it questioned the basic issue of the gospel which Paul preached. To deny that there is a resurrection of the body is to deny that Christ has been raised.

the gospel which I preached unto you.—That gospel was the word of the cross, the message that saved the believer. Paul determined to know nothing among them but Christ and Him crucified. He had reminded them in the beginning of the epistle of his confidence that they would stand unreprouvable in the presence of the Lord in the day of his coming. This, of course, implied resurrection. At the very beginning of the discussion of their problem, then, he emphasized the facts of the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. To deny the resurrection was to deny the facts of the gospel Paul preached.

which also ye received.—They had accepted these facts when they became Christians. To reject them now was to reject the foundation of their faith and hope of salvation. They had taken their stand for Christ because of the gospel that proclaimed Him as the risen Savior.

if ye hold fast.—Paul reminded them that that salvation depended on their holding fast and that this was to be done by means of the word which he preached to them. By denying the resurrection they were rejecting the means of holding fast their hope of salvation. Paul emphatically stresses what he had preached: the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

except ye believed in vain.—Was it possible that they had accepted the gospel without carefully considering its very basic issue, the resurrection of Christ? There is a warning implied in these words: they were in grave danger because of the position that some had taken on the subject of the resurrection. The one thing above all others that Christians are required to believe is that God raised Christ from the dead. See Rom. 10:9-10. Of course, as Paul argues later, if there is no resurrection, Christ has not been raised and faith is without basis or meaning.

that which also I received.—Paul preached the message to the Corinthians which he had accepted when he became a Christian. When he saw the risen Lord on the way to Damascus he gave up his role as persecutor and surrendered to Christ. From that day on, his faith did not waver. As a matter of primary importance, he had delivered this message to them, and they had accepted it. To deny the resurrection was to call in question the Scriptures and the testimony of Paul and all the others who had seen the risen Lord.

Christ died for our sins.—Christ's death concerned our sins. He shed His blood to make expiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25). John called Him the Lamb of God that takes away our sins (John 1:29).

according to the scriptures.—The death, burial and resurrection of Christ was pointed out in the Old Testament. The passover lamb and the other blood offerings looked forward to His death (Heb. 9:11-14). The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was about His death (Acts 8:30-35). On Pentecost, Peter quotes the Psalms to prove the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25-31). Jesus referred to the experience of Jonah to explain the fact that the Son of man was to be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Matt. 12:39-40). To deny the resurrection was to set aside the Old Testament scriptures.

and that he appeared.—The proof of the resurrection depends on the testimony of those who saw Him, touched Him, and heard Him speak to them after His death and resurrection. There was a sufficient number of witnesses and the appearances occurred over a long enough period of time for them to be sure that He was alive and that He will come again for those who wait for Him unto salvation (Heb. 9:27). Each of the four gospels gives detailed information about the appearances of Christ that established the fact of His resurrection. Paul refers to some of them and also to the fact that he had seen the risen Lord (9:1).

to Cephas.—Paul used Peter's Aramaic name (John 1:41-42). Both Mark and Luke mention the appearance to Peter (Mark 16:7 and Luke 24:34).

then to the twelve.—This is the general name for the group of apostles, but it does not indicate that all of the group were present. Not more than eleven and perhaps only ten were present, depending on whether or not Thomas was among them. Judas had gone to "his own place" (Acts 1:25); Matthias was not yet numbered with them.

then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once.—This was strong evidence that could still be verified for most of them were yet alive. The fact that so many saw Him at one time makes it difficult to reject their testimony. Those who denied the resurrection of the dead were not careful in weighing such evidence.

then he appeared to James.—Though Paul does not identify him, James was in all probability the Lord's brother. This again is very strong evidence of the resurrection. The brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him until after the resurrection which forced them to acknowledge Him as Lord (John 7:5; Acts 1:14; James 1:1).

then to all of the apostles.—Thomas was absent on one occasion of Jesus' appearance to the apostles (John 20:19-23). At another time he was with them when Jesus came into their midst. He examined the evidence that satisfied him that Jesus was his Lord and his God (John 20:24-28).

and last of all, he appeared to me also.—The Corinthians had heard the gospel from Paul. To deny what he said about the resurrection of Christ was to deny the foundation of their hope in Christ. The appearance of Jesus to Paul was of such importance that it is recorded three times in the book of Acts—in chapters nine, twenty-two, and twenty-six. Before king Agrippa, Paul quoted the words of Jesus telling why He appeared to Paul: "To this end have I appeared unto

thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18). All this was lost to the Corinthians who were denying the resurrection, for if there is no resurrection, Christ has not been raised.

child untimely born.—This expression which literally means an untimely birth, or miscarriage is used by Paul figuratively as a term of contempt. It apparently has nothing to do with the fact that he was the last to be appointed as an apostle of Christ. "Untimely birth" would suggest the opposite. "Dead fetus" more correctly fits the context. See Lenski, *Interpretation of First Corinthians*, p. 638. But who would call him stillborn? It well might have been his former Jewish companions who had, no doubt, looked to him as the one who, one day, was to take the place of their great teacher, Gamaliel at whose feet Saul of Tarsus had been instructed. On the way to Damascus, their hope suddenly died when Saul acknowledged Jesus as Lord and accepted the responsibility of Christ's apostle to the Gentiles. It was not an unusual thing for Jews to look upon a Jewish convert to Christianity as dead.

It seems unlikely that "untimely born" could refer to the sudden and, as some suggest, violent experience of his conversion and appointment to the apostleship. Others suggest that Paul may be expressing his own feeling toward his former life of persecuting the church of God.

the least of the apostles.—Paul was the last to whom Christ appeared. This fact is balanced with the statement that he—in his own opinion—is the least of the apostles because he had persecuted the church of God. He never got away from the memory of his activity as a persecutor. But in spite of it, God's grace was extended to him in calling him to the work of an apostle. It was not overcompensation for the life of a persecutor but love for Christ that caused him to labor more abundantly than all the apostles (II Cor. 5:14).

That this estimate of his apostleship is his own may be seen by the approval he received from Peter and John. See Gal. 2:1-10.

the grace of God which was in me.—This is the word of a truly humble Christian. He takes no credit for the great effort he had put forth for the cause of Christ; it was God's grace—God gave him the opportunity to be an apostle—that had accomplished it all. But all the apostles preached the same message, and it was that message that caused the Corinthians to believe. This was the important thing, not who did the preaching.

The Resurrection of the Dead (12-34)

Text

15:12-34. Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: 14 and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: 17 and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable.

20 But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming. 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be abolished is death. 27 For, He put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that he is excepted who did subject all things unto him. 28 And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all.

29 Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30 why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I protest by that

glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. 33 Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. 34 Awake to soberness righteously, and sin not; for some have no knowledge of God: I speak this to move you to shame.

Commentary

How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?—The glaring inconsistency of the Corinthians was too much for the logical mind of the apostle Paul! He had preached Christ crucified and raised from the dead. He had accepted this basic proposition of Christianity on his way to Damascus. The Corinthians had accepted it when they became Christians. How could they deny it now? Greek philosophers had long held the view that escape from the body at death was the goal of life, the escape from slavery. The resurrection of the body was foreign to their thinking. But the Corinthians had believed the evidence of Christ's resurrection as Paul preached it. Were they carelessly slipping back into their former views of the matter or had they just failed to really think through to the logical conclusion of Paul's proposition? "Except ye believed in vain" seems to suggest the latter.

The Sadducees said that there is no resurrection, but it is doubtful that their influence had reached to the Corinthians. See Acts 23:8 and Matt. 22:23-33.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised.—There is no escaping Paul's logic; but were the Corinthians prepared to accept the consequences of denying the resurrection of Christ? That meant that the glorious gospel of salvation and hope was without foundation in fact, and there was no basis for their faith. More than that, the apostles were found to be false witnesses of God, saying that He raised Christ from the dead, which, if there is no resurrection, is not true. To put it another way, if dead people are not raised, neither has Christ been raised (16). That means that your faith is without foundation and you are still in your sins. Were they willing to accept the consequences of denying the gospel which Paul preached? The thought—Christ is not raised—was completely unac-

ceptable to Paul, for he had seen the risen Lord on the Damascus road. Repetition at this point in the argument shows how important this issue was in establishing the fact of the resurrection of the dead. If the Corinthians were right and the apostles were wrong, then those who died believing in Christ had perished.

we are of all men most pitiable.—This is the last in the list of tragic results of denying that Christ has been raised. What is the antecedent of "we"? Is Paul saying that Christians, assuming there is no resurrection, are more pitiable than others? Are not Christians in this life blessed beyond others? They have, if they are willing to accept it, the "peace that passeth understanding" to guard their hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7). They may not, in some cases, have as much in material possession as some others, but they know that life does not consist in the abundance of things which man possesses (Luke 12:15).

It is possible that Paul is speaking of the apostles. But why would they be more pitiable than all if there is no resurrection? The answer may be found in Paul's own words in 4:9-13. The apostles were men doomed to die; they were a spectacle to the world and to angels. They were fools for Christ's sake; they were weak; they were held in disrepute. They suffered hunger and thirst; they were poorly clad; they were buffeted and without homes; they labored with their hands rather than being supported with the dignity accorded other teachers. They were reviled, persecuted, and slandered; they became the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

All this, they suffered because they believed that God had raised Christ from the dead, and they looked in hope to the coming of the Lord.

the firstfruits of them that are asleep.—The fact of Christ's resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the dead. In Old Testament times the first portion of the harvest was given to the Lord as an indication that all the harvest was in reality His. Whatever firstfruits was the rest was. Christ who died was raised from the dead; His resurrection was like "firstfruits" in that all the dead must be raised.

For since by man came death.—Physical death is the penalty for the transgression of God's law in the Garden by Adam. The resurrection which cancels the penalty of death comes through man also, that is, Christ, for as in Adam all die, all shall be made alive in Christ. What happens after the resurrection is another matter. Jesus said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs

shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

they that are Christ's at his coming.—For Paul's own comment, see I Thess. 4:13-18.

deliver up the kingdom of God.—Those who have accepted the rule of Christ by faith and obedience to His gospel and have remained faithful to Him until death are all to be presented to the Father in the "eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:11). The apostle was anticipating this when he wrote in the beginning of the epistle that they were to wait "for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be unreprouable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:7-8). In that eternal kingdom there will be the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

For he must reign.—The angel promised that He was to reign on the throne of His father David (Lk. 1:32). The writer of Hebrews declares that when He had made purification for sins He assumed the seat of authority as King at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3). Peter declared that the promise to David was fulfilled when Christ arose and ascended to the right hand of the Father, "for David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" (Acts 2:29-35). Now Paul declares that the last enemy to be abolished is death. In it all, the Son is subject to God.

Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead?—The problem in this text is: What is meant by "for" the dead? It cannot mean that Christians were getting themselves baptized on behalf of some friend or relative who had died without being baptized into Christ. Although such a thing was done much later, there is no good evidence that it was being done in the time of the apostles. Paul wrote this epistle to correct errors that had crept into the thinking and conduct of the church. It is strange that he would not label this an error if the Corinthians were actually practicing vicarious baptism. Baptism was a personal act for the one who believed and repented of his sins (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). One might go through a form of immersion and pretend that it was for some dead friend, but that one could in no way fulfill the requirements of faith and repentance for another.

The preposition which is translated "for" in this verse is also translated "for" in verse three where it evidently means "concerning" or "because of." In Rom. 9:27 it is translated "concerning" and in John 1:30 "of." John the Baptist had spoken about Jesus who he said was the Lamb of God. The basic meaning of the preposition is "over" and its resultant meaning is "concerning" or "with reference to." There are other meanings also, but our problem is to determine which fits the context, being careful not to read into obscure passages such as this one meanings that are contrary to what is taught on the subject of baptism in the plain passages.

This text suggests that there was something in the act of baptism that had to do with the resurrection of the dead, for baptism is both a burial and a resurrection (Rom. 6:4). But if there is no resurrection, it is meaningless to go through a burial and a resurrection in the act of being baptized into Christ. Some object that this is reading too much into the text, but the whole chapter concerns the resurrection of the dead, and in the next verse Paul asks, "If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" If there is no resurrection, baptism as to form and purpose is meaningless.

Some think that the verse means baptism for the purpose of pleasing some friend or relative who had died. While such a motive would not necessarily invalidate one's baptism, it is not likely that the language of the text has this meaning.

why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?—Why should Paul and others face the constant danger of losing their lives if there is no resurrection? The act of baptism suggests that there is a resurrection; but if there isn't, there is no point in suffering needlessly in this life. Why suffer here if there is no hope of life beyond the grave where there will be no pain nor death nor suffering? Paul said, "I die daily," but it was a needless risk if there is no resurrection.

I fought with beasts at Ephesus.—This is another reference to the jeopardy which he faced. There was no point to it if there is no resurrection. Some assume that the fighting with wild beasts is to be regarded as figurative for the struggle he had with the vicious men who opposed him at Ephesus. It is true that men can be like wild beasts when they decided to destroy someone who disturbs their conscience. There is no record in Acts of any literal battle with beasts in which Paul was engaged. But this does not prove that he didn't have such an experience. It is argued also that since he was a Roman he could not have been subjected to such treatment, but authorities didn't always

ask about such issues. See Acts 16:37. But whether he did or did not face real beasts, his life was in real danger and there was no point to it if there is no such thing as a resurrection from the dead. Therefore he says, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Evil companionships.—The Corinthians were being deceived by associates who did not hold the truth of the gospel. Paul urges them to wake up and stop being deceived by those who have no knowledge of God. Intelligent people should be ashamed of being deceived when the facts of the gospel had been so clearly presented to them with the evidence that definitely established the resurrection of Christ.

Answer to Problems of The Resurrection (35-58)

Text

15:35-58. But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? 36 Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened except it die: 37 and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; 38 but God giveth it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own. 39 All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes. 40 There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven. 48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? 56 The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: 57 but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord.

Commentary

But some will say.—The apostle is ready now to answer the objections of the critics. Perhaps many were sincere in their inability to see how there could be such a thing as the resurrection of the body which disintegrates in death. The Sadducees in Jesus's day objected on a different ground and were told that they were ignorant of the Scriptures and did not know the power of God (Matt. 22:29). The Corinthians wanted to know how the dead are raised and with what kind of body? Paul answers both questions by a simple reference to the fact that the seed that is sown dies that the new plant may spring from it. God gives each kind of seed the kind of new plant that pleases Him. God will equip the saint with the kind of body that pleases Him. Paul says that it will be fashioned anew to conform to the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). John says that we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2).

So also is the resurrection.—Paul argues from the facts that all flesh is not the same kind, and that there are both celestial and terrestrial bodies, and that one star differs in glory from another, and that the resurrection body will be different. He then explains that difference: It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. Dishonor is balance with glory; weakness with power; natural body with spiritual.

If there is a natural body.—If there is a body for this life, there is a body for the heavenly life. See Paul's comment in II Cor. 4:16-5:10.

The first man Adam . . . The last Adam.—All of us have a physical body that is subject to death because we are descendants of the first man Adam. The saints will have a heavenly body because they belong to the last Adam who as a spiritual being gives life to those who believe in Him. See John 4:24; 5:21; 6:57-63.

flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.—That kingdom is spiritual, difficult though this is for us to grasp. The body which God gives us in which to glorify Him in this life must be changed into the likeness of the glorious body of Christ in order that we might continue to glorify Him in heaven. Paul is now ready to tell this secret.

We all shall not sleep.—Enoch and Elijah did not see death (Heb. 11:5; II Ki. 2:1). When Christ comes again there will be those who will be taken up to meet Him in the air along with those who will be raised from the dead (I Thes. 4:13-18).

but we shall all be changed.—This is the secret that some apparently did not know; all who are to be with the risen Lord in heaven are to be changed when the dead shall be raised incorruptible. Then Death is swallowed up in victory.

thanks be to God.—Paul who had seen the risen Lord looked to this time of triumph through Him with thanksgiving to God.

your labor is not vain in the Lord.—This triumphant note of hope called for steadfastness on the part of the brethren whom Paul loved. He urged them to stand firm in this conviction and abound always in the work of the Lord. The hope of the resurrection was enough for them to know that their labor was not vain in the Lord.

Summary

This great chapter concerns the resurrection. Paul has now reached the climax of this remarkable epistle covering so many of the problems that the church faced in Corinth.

It may be that it was most urgent for him to answer the problems of division and dereliction reported by those of the house of Chloe, but it was most important for the saints that he answer their questions about the resurrection which lay at the foundation of their faith and hope. It is true that they needed to know the answers to the questions that puzzled them about marriage, idolatry, and worship; but the answer to the questions about the resurrection was even more necessary

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because it had to do with their eternal hope in Christ and the goal toward which all Christians were striving. It was necessary that he show them the most excellent way of love that they might correct the misuse of spiritual gifts, but it was also necessary that he reassure them of the foundation of the Christian life by logical proof that there is a resurrection from the dead.

At the beginning of the chapter, Paul reminds the Corinthians about the facts of the gospel which he preached to them. That gospel was based on the well established facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Paul had accepted the fact of the resurrection of Christ when he surrendered to the Lord on the Damascus road. Nothing could shake his conviction on this issue for he had heard the voice of the Lord when He appointed him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. The Corinthians had accepted the fact of Christ's resurrection when they became Christians, but because some were saying that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, they were in need of reassurance on this great issue.

The resurrection of Christ was according to the Scriptures and it was supported by the testimony of those who saw Him after He was raised from the dead. Cephas, James, the five hundred, and Paul testified that Christ had been raised. There was no reason for the brethren to doubt it.

It was by God's grace that Paul had been able to labor more than all the apostles in proclaiming this fact to the Gentiles. Because he was dealing with the Greek mind that was trained in logic, he presented a series of arguments that was designed to reestablish their belief in the resurrection of the dead. He had presented evidence to prove to them again that Christ had been raised. But, he said, if there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised. To put it in another form, if dead people are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. *Were they ready to accept the consequences of their unbelief?*

If Christ has not been raised, their faith was without meaning; they were still in their sins; those who had died believing in Christ had perished; and the apostles who were like men doomed to death were a most pitiable spectacle before angels and the world.

Paul took his stand on the evidence that could not be denied that Christ has been raised from the dead. He showed what this meant to the Christian because Christ's resurrection was similar to the firstfruits of the Old Testament harvest. As in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive. Christ must reign until He conquers every enemy, the

last of which is death. Then He will present the redeemed in triumph to the Father to whom He also is subject for God is all in all.

He reminded them of their baptism which is a burial and a resurrection. Why go through such an experience if there is no resurrection? Why live in jeopardy daily as Paul had done at Ephesus? Why not say, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."? It was time for them to think soberly and to break with those who were repudiating the very foundation of faith and hope.

Paul answered two questions that puzzled the people. They probably came from their background of training in Greek philosophy. They had been led to believe that to escape from the body in death was the goal of life. They wanted to know how it was possible for the body that disintegrates in death to be raised, and what kind of body they were to have in the resurrection. Paul gave them a simple yet adequate answer. The seed that falls into the ground dies and from it comes a new plant. God gives it a new "body" as it pleases Him. The resurrection body will be different, but it will be what God pleases to make it. As there is a difference in flesh, and celestial bodies, and in the glory of the stars so there will be a difference between the earthly and the heavenly body. The heavenly body will not be subject to the problems of the earthly body. We derive our earthly body from Adam; our spiritual body is from Christ, the last Adam. The corruptible body will be replaced by the incorruptible body. Paul is now ready to tell them the secret.

Not all shall die, for some will be alive when Christ comes; but all shall be changed in the moment when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised incorruptible. Then Death will be swallowed up in victory! Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To this triumphant note of hope, Paul adds his affectionate appeal for the brethren to remain unmovable in the work of the Lord for now they know that their labors are not in vain.

Questions

1. Why did Paul begin the discussion of the resurrection of the dead by referring to the gospel which he had preached?
2. What are the facts of the gospel which Paul preached?
3. Why did he remind them that he had accepted the fact of the resurrection?
4. Why remind them that they also had accepted it?

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5. Why did he add, "if ye hold fast"?
6. By what were they to hold fast?
7. What did he mean by "believed in vain"?
8. Why did Christ die?
9. In what Scriptures do we find the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ?
10. What evidence is presented in the New Testament to prove the fact of the resurrection of Christ?
11. What is the significance of the fact that five hundred saw Him at one time?
12. Why did Paul mention Cephas as a witness of the resurrection?
13. In what sense is "the twelve" used here?
14. What is the value of the testimony of James?
15. What is the value of the testimony of Thomas who was present when Christ appeared to all the apostles?
16. Why did Paul mention the fact that Christ appeared to him last of all?
17. How is the importance of this fact indicated in the book of Acts?
18. What does the expression, "child untimely born," mean?
19. Who may have applied it to Paul? Why?
20. Why did Paul call himself the least of the apostles?
21. To what did Paul attribute the fact that he had labored more than all the apostles?
22. What glaring inconsistency did Paul see in the thinking of the Corinthians?
23. What were some of the consequences of denying that Christ had been raised?
24. To whom does the expression, "of all men most pitiable," refer?
25. What is the meaning of "firstfruits"?
26. What did Paul imply as to the resurrection by this term?
27. Why does Paul say that death came by man?
28. What will Christ do for all men in the resurrection?
29. Does this imply universal salvation?
30. What did Jesus say about the resurrection of the good and the bad?
31. How does Paul describe the resurrection in First Thessalonians?
32. What is meant by the statement that Christ will deliver the kingdom to God?
33. When did the reign of Christ begin?

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34. In the expression, "baptized for the dead," what are some of the possible meanings of the preposition translated "for"?
35. What are the arguments against the assumption that this is vicarious baptism?
36. What bearing does baptism have on the doctrine of the resurrection?
37. What rule of interpretation must be observed in treating obscure passages?
38. What are the views on Paul's remark about fighting beasts at Ephesus?
39. Why did Paul shame the people at Corinth?
40. What are the two questions which the Corinthians asked about the resurrection?
41. What was the view of the Sadducees on the resurrection?
42. What was taught in Greek philosophy about escape from the body?
43. What is the Christian view about absence from the body?
44. How did Paul show that the resurrection body must be different from the earthly body?
45. What will the resurrection body be like?
46. Why is Jesus called the last Adam?
47. Why can't flesh and blood inherit the kingdom of God?
48. What will happen to those who are alive when Christ comes?
49. Why does Paul stress the fact that all shall be changed?
50. What did Paul ask the brethren to do in view of this assurance of the resurrection?

For Discussion

1. Would it be worthwhile to be a Christian if there were no hope of the resurrection?
2. What place should the doctrine of the resurrection have in the thinking of Christian people.
3. Should we leave the subject of the resurrection to Easter Sunday?