

Chapter Fifteen

THE PROBLEM OF THE RESURRECTION

(15:1-58)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. In accordance with what “scripture” did Christ die and arise from the dead?
2. When did the resurrected Christ appear to five hundred brethren at once?
3. Is it the death of Christ, or the resurrection of Christ, that takes away sin?
4. Are there different “orders” of being resurrected from the dead?
5. What is “being baptized on behalf of the dead”?
6. What kind of body will believers have after the resurrection?

SECTION 1

Its Historicity (15:1-11)

15 Now I would remind you brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

15:1-2 Existentialism: This chapter clearly shows that some of the Corinthians were dealing with the gospel existentially. Some of them

had gotten the idea (perhaps from some Gnostics) that the source of the gospel was in *their* feelings, opinions and decisions. Paul warned them in 14:36, "Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" They were looking upon the gospel *not* as a *revelation* of the truth they had *received* (15:1-2), *not* as something that had *objectivity* in itself outside of them, but as something they could invent or decide to suit their own carnal desires. There were some who were teaching (see comments 15:33) there was no resurrection of the dead (15:12) and that Christianity was for this world only, just like other religions.

Existentialism is a philosophical revolt against objectivity. It is rooted in introspection, subjectivism, and focuses entirely on the experiential. It determines the worth of knowledge not in relation to objective fact and revealed truth, but according to the value determined by the autonomous (self-ruled) consciousness of the individual human being. In other words, everything is valuable only in relation to what each individual feels or decides about it. And the individual's decision is based on that individual's feelings. Feelings are the only criteria for decision. Existentialism is the ultimate relativism. Each individual is his or her own "absolute." One individual must never let another individual decide for him, nor must he use another individual's feelings for his choice. Truth, for the existentialist, "becomes" at any given moment whatever he decides it is to him. It is in this self-sovereign determination of truth that the individual allegedly finds his existence. Existentialism is a philosophy as old as man. Centuries before Christ, Greek philosophers were expounding forms of existentialism. It is also as common as "Main Street, America." It is the philosophy of the masses, whether they know it or not, and is expressed in such phrases as, "Whatever turns you on!" or "Everybody ought to do their own thing," or "I know what I feel, regardless of what the Bible says." The existential theologian usually approaches Christianity with an "orthodox" vocabulary, but his terms have meanings different than what would be expected. Since, for the existentialist, nothing can be true unless he has personally felt it, experienced it, and decided it, he says: (a) God could not be God and be human, so God is "wholly other" and, therefore, a divine-incarnation could not have actually occurred. Since the supernatural cannot be incarnated, wherever the Gospels say Jesus did something miraculous, we must understand it as a Christian accommodation of pagan mythology; (b) there is Christian resurrection, but this is merely

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a subjective resurrection of the Jesus-faith in my feelings, and only when I decide it has happened; (c) Heaven is something I feel in my personal Christian experience; it is not an objective place.

It will be apparent as we study this chapter that the Corinthians had been taught a somewhat existential approach to the resurrection of the dead. Paul wants them to understand clearly that the Gospel was something which he *delivered* to them; they did not have it within themselves. The origin of the Gospel had nothing to do with their feelings or autonomous decisions. While they would be responsible to decide for themselves what to *do* about the logical, spiritual and moral demands of the Gospel, their decisions would not determine whether the events had happened or not. The gospel is a fact whether men decide it is, or not. The gospel originated in a Person (Christ) and in deeds he did which were prophesied long before in "the scriptures." There are *clues* all the way through this epistle to substantiate the proposition that the Corinthians were taking an existential approach to the gospel: (1) their decision to follow certain teachers based on their own feelings, chapter 1; (2) their toying with the idea that the doctrine of the "cross" was foolishness; (3) their inability to accept the idea of "revelation" in human words, chapter 2; (4) their constant infatuation with the spectacular, ego-inflating miraculous gifts, chapters 12-14; (5) their humanistic skepticism concerning the nature of a resurrected body, chapter 15:35ff.

Paul is going to remind them (in chapter 15) of the "gospel which he gospelized" (Gr. *euangelion ho euangelisamen humin*) to them. He is going to remind them "with what word" (Gr. *tini logo*), or "in what form," or "in what terms" he had preached the gospel to them. They had *received* the gospel on the terms (or, "in the form") of its *historicity*. But now they were doubting. Now they were approaching it existentially, subjectively. Their steadfastness in the faith, indeed, their salvation, is conditioned upon their holding fast (Gr. *ei katechete*, if you hold fast) the gospel in the precise terms it was preached to them. Those terms were its *empirical historicity*. Paul reflects that the Corinthians might have believed his initial message of the gospel to them in a haphazard way. The Greek word *eike* is translated "in vain"; it does not mean "without cause" but "without due consideration, rashly, superficially." Did the Corinthians first believe the gospel by some shallow enthusiasm or through some passing fancy for a new thing? Did they not give serious thought when they embraced the gospel? There are people today whose allegiance to Christ has been made without regard to "the terms" or the

form of the gospel. One's emotional attachment to Jesus must be preceded by and controlled by a constant reception of the gospel, mentally, in both its form and its substance. A hasty experiential and existential attachment to Jesus is vulnerable to the vacillation of feelings and circumstances. Such an attachment cannot produce steadfastness nor can it save. It is important to take note of the word "if" in 15:2. Salvation is free—but salvation is conditioned upon man's holding to the gospel in its apostolic form. The Greek word *katechete* means, "to have and to hold as in marriage," "to be affected by, subjected to, to seize, to possess." Man's response to the free gift of salvation demands more than a superficial fancy or whim. It is a life and death commitment; an eternal allegiance.

15:3-4 Empirical: Paul delivered to the Corinthians the *fundamental essence* (Gr. *protois*, "first things") of the gospel. That fundamental essence is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He wants the Corinthians to remember he preached, and they believed, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a matter of empirical history. At Corinth Paul "persuaded" and "taught" the gospel a year and a half (Acts 18:1-11). His proof of the gospel was empirical, logical, and historical. This is where the gospel begins. This is its basis. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened whether men wish it had or not, whether men decide it has or not. Christ arose whether men love it or despise it, and nothing can ever erase it from history. Men may accept or reject its moral imperatives, but they cannot "feel" it or "decide" it out of existence. In the same way, men "deliberately ignore the fact" of a world-wide flood (II Peter 3:3-7), but they cannot ignore the fossil evidence out of existence.

Our faith in Jesus Christ rests solely on the historicity of his resurrection, for if that is not an empirical fact, everything else he claimed, and is claimed for him, is open to suspicion of deliberate fraud or ignorant mythology. And, whether he rose from the dead or not rests solely upon the authenticity, credibility, and accuracy of the texts of the Bible. The gospel is not true because it works; *it works because it is true!*

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853), one of the greatest legal minds in U.S. history, former head of the Harvard Law School, set forth the following rules of evidence in his book, *The Testimony of The Evangelists*, pub. Baker Book House, pp. 1-54:

1. The foundation of Christianity is based on facts. These facts are testified to as having occurred within the personal knowledge

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of the Gospel writers. Christianity, then, rests upon the credibility of these witnesses.

2. A proposition of fact is proved, when its truth is established by competent and satisfactory evidence beyond reasonable doubt.
3. In the absence of circumstances which generate suspicion, every witness is to be presumed to be credible, until the contrary is shown . . . The burden of impeaching his credibility lies upon the objector.
4. All witnesses are entitled to the benefit of the axiom that men ordinarily speak the truth (are honest) when they have no prevailing motive or inducement to the contrary.
5. The ability of a witness to speak the truth depends on the opportunities he has had for observing the facts, the accuracy of his powers of observing and the trustworthiness of his memory. The authors of the Gospels can be granted at least the abilities of most human witnesses until the contrary is shown.
6. There must be enough disparity in the number and consistency of the witnesses to show there is no room for collusion, yet enough agreement to show they were independent recorders of the same events.
7. The testimony of the witnesses must conform in general with the experiences of others concerning similar circumstances or subject matter.

The four Gospels are accurate records. Any honest researcher should declare their compliance with the accepted "rules of evidence" unimpeachable. As authentic, competent, credible works of history, the four Gospels are impeccable.

Paul's reference to Christ's death, burial and resurrection, "in accordance with the scriptures" is significant. He means that the fundamental facts of the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were predicted in the Old Testament scriptures. That is a presentation of evidence which can be tested scientifically, or legally, at any time, by anyone who is honest enough to forego personal presuppositions. Prophecies made centuries before their fulfillment, the fulfillment of which is documented in minute detail, and in which factors of their fulfillment is beyond the power of human planning or manipulation, are sufficient evidence to prove the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, or no proposition can ever be proved! Blaise

Pascal, one of the greatest scientific minds of all time, wrote these meaningful words: "The greatest of the proofs of Jesus Christ are the prophecies. They are also what God has most provided for, for the event which has fulfilled them is a miracle of God." The betrayal and trial of Jesus of Nazareth is predicted in Isaiah 53:7; Zech. 11:12-13; 13:7. His death is predicted in Isa. 53:4-9; Zech. 12:10; Ps. 22:16). Even his dying words were foretold (Ps. 22:1ff.; 31:5). His burial in a rich man's tomb was predicted (Isa. 53:9). His resurrection was predicted (see Isa. 53:10-12; Ps. 16:10-11; Acts 2:25-32; 13:33-35). There are over 300 prophecies concerning the Messiah, including the exact village of his birth, the exact year of his birth, the miraculous nature of his birth, all the main events of his life and ministry. If these were not fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, in whom were they fulfilled?—Alexander the Great? Julius Caesar? Winston Churchill? Most of these prophecies about the Messiah were not fulfilled by the friends of Jesus, nor even by Jesus himself, but by his enemies or disinterested parties! There was no collusion between Jesus and his friends to fulfill these prophecies. The Old Testament canon of scripture was already set and well known by the Jews hundreds of years before Jesus was born and for any man to have changed them or altered them to fit the life of Jesus, after the fact, would have required so many things out of the ordinary in the way of favorable circumstances, miracles would have been demanded. To fulfill these prophecies without supernatural ability to anticipate human behavior and natural circumstances would be impossible! The apostle Peter declares that the fulfillment of prophecy is a surer proof of the deity of Christ and the infallibility of the scriptures than what he had witnessed with his own eyes! (cf. II Peter 1:16-19). This may be why Paul introduced prophetic evidence of Jesus' resurrection before introducing the evidence of eyewitnesses! Jesus expected prophetic evidence to take precedence over what people saw with their eyes (see Luke 24:25ff.)!

15:5-11 Eyewitnessed: Paul appeals to eyewitnessed testimony to establish the fact of the resurrection of Christ. "To establish the historicity of the facts of Christianity, nothing more is demanded than is readily conceded to every branch of human science. Christianity does not profess to convince the perverse and headstrong, to bring irresistible evidence, to vanquish every question. All it professes is to propose such evidence as may satisfy the disciplined, teachable, honest, serious searcher." Simon Greenleaf, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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The question, therefore, before the Corinthians was, could they believe the testimony of the eyewitnesses named by the apostle Paul: (1) were those people Paul named competent witnesses—were they capable of having seen Jesus crucified, buried, and risen from the dead? were they in a position to have known the facts? were they so credulous they would have believed anything? Their records (the Gospels) candidly portray one another as incredulous, “of little faith,” “unbelieving,” even skeptical; (2) were the eyewitnesses people who would lie? were they honest or dishonest? did they have anything to gain by lying about the events they said they witnessed? did they have anything to gain by fabricating the events recorded in the Gospels? The gospel, in the form they proclaimed it, brought them no power, no riches, no accolades from the mighty—only persecution, slander, poverty and death—yet they went to their death insisting on its historicity; (3) were the eyewitnesses so few as to give reasonable doubt to their testimony? There were the women, the eleven apostles in a group, ten apostles in a group, Peter and James individually, over five hundred brethren at one time, and the guards at the tomb and their superiors (Matt. 28:11-15); (4) was there any empirical, historical, scientific evidence to the contrary? has any evidence come to light for the last two thousand years to contradict the Gospels? did anyone present the dead body of Jesus to prove he had not arisen? did anyone show his dead body in the tomb after the third day of his burial? The surest way for the enemies of Christianity to have destroyed it would have been to present the dead body of Jesus at the time the apostles began to preach his resurrection (Acts 2:1ff.). The only record we have of the response made to the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts and Epistles of the New Testament) is that the enemies of Christianity slandered, persecuted and killed its proclaimers. The enemies offered not one iota of scientific, historical evidence to refute the gospel. There have been many *theories* over the centuries, suggesting alternatives to accepting Christ’s resurrection as a fact; *but there has been no evidence!* The reader is here urged to add to this a thorough study of *The Gospel of Luke*, by Paul T. Butler, College Press Publishing Company, pp. 476-605.

Finally, Paul lists *himself* as an eyewitness to the fact of Jesus’ resurrection (15:8-11). He was not with the other eleven apostles during the forty days Jesus appeared to them in his resurrected body (Acts 1:3). But Paul *saw* the Lord (Acts 9:27; 26:16, 19; I Cor. 9:1). Jesus appeared to him some years later as he journeyed on

the road to Damascus. If ever there was a person set against the proposition that Jesus of Nazareth arose from the dead it would be Paul (formerly called, Saul of Tarsus)! If ever there was a person who would have demanded visible, empirical evidence before becoming a believer in Jesus, it would have been Paul! He was thoroughly convinced to do everything he could to oppose Jesus of Nazareth and Christianity (see Acts 22:3-5; 26:9-11). In all good conscience, he actually believed he was serving God by opposing Christ and executing Christ's followers (see I Tim. 1:13). If ever there was a person with the best opportunities and capabilities to *prove* that Jesus of Nazareth had *not* arisen from the tomb, it would be Paul! So, how do we account for the greatest enemy Jesus and the Church ever had, becoming the greatest apostle, persuader of others, and missionary the Church ever had? And the list of enemies converted does not stop with Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Three thousand Jews on the Day of Pentecost, some of whom had probably been at Passover, crying, "Crucify him, crucify him," were converted (Acts 2:1ff.). A great company of Hebrew priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). Some of Caesar's Praetorian Guard probably became Christians (Phil. 1:13) and some of Caesar's own "household" were converted (Phil. 4:22)! If there had been any good evidence to contradict the resurrection of Jesus Christ, some of these people would have *known* it and would have *brought it forward* for the whole world of that day to acknowledge.

Any person today who says Jesus of Nazareth was not raised from the dead is obligated to produce proof. It is the burden of the unbeliever to produce evidence. It must be historical, empirical, scientific evidence. He must produce authentic, accurate, credible eyewitnesses with evidence. Theories will not do! Christians believe on the basis of the written documents of those who saw, heard and touched the resurrected Jesus (I John 1:1-4). The argument is not *whether* a resurrection *could* or *could not* occur. The case in point is, *did* a resurrection occur or *did it not*. The case is not to be resolved philosophically, but historically, legally, on the basis of evidence and testimony. The answer is, YES! beyond any reasonable doubt!

SECTION 2

Its Holiness (15:12-34)

12 Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

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¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall we be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom of God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷“For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection under him,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. ²⁸When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

²⁹Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? ³⁰Why am I in peril every hour? ³¹I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³²What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” ³³Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” ³⁴Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

15:12-19 Cleanses From Defilement: Paul asks, “If I am preaching Christ as raised from the dead, what do some of you expect to gain by saying there is no resurrection for believers?” He proceeds to

answer his own rhetorical question by saying, in essence, "You can't have the hope if you don't have the history!" If Christ was not raised from the dead, then hoping in him for anything else is vain. If Christ is not raised, and if there is no resurrection for those who trust in Christ, then the whole Christian religion is in vain.

First, apostolic preaching would be vain if there is no resurrection. All Christian preaching for two hundred centuries would be vain if Christ is not historically, actually, factually raised from the dead. Why, then, do men who do not believe the historical resurrection of Christ preach the Christian religion? For money (Jesus predicted there would be hirelings, John 10:10-13; Paul predicted there would be some from among the "Christian" religion who would exploit it, Acts 20:29-30); for position or fame—there are those who love the praise of men more than the praise of God. There are some who do not want the moral implications which the historical resurrection of Jesus would force upon them, but they want the "Christian religion" to try to *soften* by euphemistic (but useless) verbiage the cruel, stark, reality of injustices never to be righted, of tribulations and sacrifices never to be repaid or vindicated, to soften the utter defeat of human death. An existential philosopher said, and without the resurrection he is correct, "Life is never more absurd than at the grave." But, hallelujah, because of the fact of the resurrection life is never absurd!

Second, all faith would be void without the resurrection. Faith in God, Christ, the Bible, faith that truth is better than falsehood, faith that goodness and love is to be preferred over evil and hate, faith in today and tomorrow, faith that life is worth living—all is useless if there is no life beyond the grave, no heaven, no eternity, no truth, no God. The apostles were false witnesses, the most despicable charlatans or ignorant dupes who ever lived, if the resurrection of Christ is not historically valid. But are we to believe they have gotten by with such a monstrous hoax, having duped millions of the best minds for almost two millenniums? Could what their testimony produced for all these centuries have been produced by the cruelest, most preposterous lie ever perpetrated upon the human race?

Third, and *most crucial*, if Christ has not been raised, those who have believed in him are not forgiven—they are still *in* their sins. The cross, the vicarious, substitutionary atonement of Christ's death, is invalid without the resurrection. The only hope we have that Christ did what he promised to do by the cross is his resurrection (see II Cor.

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1:20; I Peter 1:3-5; Luke 24:44-48). If Christ's promise of atonement for man's sin is not validated by his resurrection from the dead, he is simply another crucified Jew, and his death has not as much efficacy to atone for my sins as an animal sacrifice. Study the sermons of the apostles and evangelists in the book of Acts. They did not wait until the "annual Easter services" to proclaim the resurrection. They never preached the death of Christ without preaching his resurrection! Too much modern preaching is depending upon the sentimentalism aroused by portraying the shocking violence of Jesus' death. The mental decisiveness brought about by the persuading evidence of the resurrection, without which there is no true conversion, is seldom made the focus of either edificatory or evangelistic proclamation. If we are going to restore the church of the New Testament, we must restore the *gospel* of the New Testament!

If Christ is not raised, then those who have "fallen asleep" (died) have *perished*. Are we to believe that all the millions of Christians who have poured out their lives upon the altars of love, usefulness and goodness have *perished* and will not be raised from the dead? That includes some of my very dear ones, and yours! Will faith, and love, and goodness perish, and wickedness, falsehood and dissolution win, after all? Is there no wiping out of defilement? No forgiveness of sin? No vindication of faith? Without the resurrection there is none!

If a man's hope in Christ and his teachings is to be restricted to this life on earth only, he is, of all men, most pitiful. The word *eleeinoteroi*, from the Greek word *eleos* (mercy, pity), is translated in the KJV as "miserable." It means, "to be pitied." If this life is all there is, Christians are pitiful fools to be hoping in Christ. They would be better off to abandon the teachings of Jesus which insist on "counting others better than self," or "turning the other cheek," or "not pleasing oneself, but pleasing one's neighbor, for his good," or giving up one's liberty and rights for the sake of others. If this life is all there is, people would be better off following Buddha or Mohammed, or Darwin or Marx, or no one! Certainly, if there is no resurrection, and Christ is not who he claims he is, and this is all the life there is, those who still maintain allegiance to the Christian faith are either "putting us on" or self-deceived, living in a dream world of their own creation; see Special Study entitled, "On Cloud Nine."

15:20-28 Conquers Dissolution: This is *not* the only life there is! Christ has, in fact, been raised from the dead. He is the "firstfruit" of resurrection from the dead. The Bible record documents the fact

that there were persons resurrected from death, chronologically, before Jesus. In fact, Jesus raised three people (Jairus' daughter; the widow's son at Nain; and Lazarus) before his own resurrection took place. But Paul is not speaking chronologically here, unless he is denoting the uniqueness of Christ's resurrection over those preceding his. All others resurrected from death died again. Their bodies have suffered the same decay and dissolution all other human bodies suffer. But when Jesus rose from the grave, he did not die again. He ascended, after forty days, to heaven in the body which came out of the tomb. The apostles were eye witnesses to this ascension (Acts 1:9-11). From heaven Jesus has appeared to some (Paul, John). But Paul's figure of speech "firstfruit" (*Gr. aparche*, akin to *aparchomai* which means, "to make a beginning") is from Old Testament times. In the Law of Moses the first portion of the harvest was to be given to the Lord as an indication the worshiper understood that *all* the harvest was, in reality, the Lord's (Deut. 26:2-11). Whatever "firstfruit" was, the rest of the harvest was. Christ's resurrection was "firstfruit" of all the dead. Adam was, because of his sin, "firstfruit" of the death of humanity; Christ was, because of his sinlessness, "firstfruit" of the resurrection of humanity. All mankind dies bodily because of Adam's sin; all mankind is to be resurrected bodily because of Christ's victory over sin. That is all Paul is saying here. He is not teaching "original sin" and "total depravity," and he is not teaching "universal salvation." All creation, man and matter, belongs to God. He will resurrect it all. Temporarily, God has subjected all his creation to futility, hoping it will hope, and one day be set free from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18-25). But only those who trust Christ as their "firstfruit" will be adopted as sons. *All* of dead humanity will be resurrected, but only those who have trusted Christ will be given eternal life; those who have not trusted Christ will be imprisoned forever in torment (see John 5:25-28; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 14:9-13; Rev. 20:11—22:5).

"Each in his own order" does not mean there are going to be two or three increments to the resurrection of humanity, separated by time. Paul clears up any misunderstanding about that in his epistle to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 4:13—5:3). When Jesus comes again to resurrect humanity, it will be one complete, final resurrection. No segment of humanity, physically alive or dead, will "precede" the other. Paul uses the Greek word *tagmati* in 15:23 and it is translated "order." *Tagma* is a Greek military term meaning "a rank, a company,

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a group." Paul explains what he means by "order" in the last half of verse 23. Christ's resurrection *ranks* first and is "firstfruit"—then, at his second coming, the *second ranking* resurrection of the whole harvest of humanity, including those who belong to him. It is *rank* of resurrection emphasized, not chronology, to *prove* there will be a second rank because there was a first.

At Christ's coming is the end. The KJV italicizes the word *cometh* in verse 24, indicating it is a supplied word. And that is more to be desired than the RSV translation which is: "Then comes the end. . . ." The Greek text is: *eita to telos*, literally, "then, the end." Christ's second coming and the end are *simultaneous*. God's redemptive program will find its *telos*, its goal, its completion, when Jesus comes to resurrect all the dead. Then will come to an end this world and all its powers. There will be no more pretending powers, no more powers temporarily granted by God to human beings. God alone will exercise sovereignty. All others will be willing servants, or banished, incarcerated enemies. In the meantime the Son reigns until he has established all that God has spoken by the mouths of his prophets (see Acts 3:17-26), both Old and New Testament prophets. The Bible clearly teaches that no human being is going to know when Christ is coming back (see our comments, *The Gospel of Luke*, College Press Publishing Company, pp. 467-519). How long Christ will take to "put all his enemies under his feet," and who those "enemies" are, we do not know. But the fact of his resurrection makes it *certain* that day will come (see Acts 17:30-31). The last "enemy" is death (cf. Rev. 20:9-15). Death will be *abolished* (Gr. *katargeitai*, "destroyed")—it will not exist anymore.

God has subjected this world and all creation to the Son (Christ) (John 5:19-29) in order that the Son might carry out his redemptive and mediatorial work. This work began with his incarnation and continues through his high priesthood (cf. the book of Hebrews). But when the Son finishes this work and returns to consummate redemption and judgment, there will be no more need for mediation. The person of Son will be the person of eternal Father, that God may be everything to every one.

15:29-34 Conserves Decency: Only by the power of faith in the resurrection will man be able to preserve moral goodness. Only those who hope to be welcomed to heaven and become as Jesus is will have the power to desire holiness (I John 3:1-3).

The discussion of the purifying power of the hope of resurrection is begun by questioning the Corinthians on their reason for having

been baptized. The RSV translates: "Otherwise what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?" The Greek preposition, *huper*, may be translated either "on behalf of" or "with reference to." In the light of the context, and the following evidence, we believe the second translation is the correct one. The Corinthian Christians were being asked, "If the dead are not actually raised, why are people still becoming Christians and being baptized *with reference to* the resurrection from the dead?"

Some commentators think this verse (15:29) is a reference to an ancient practice among Christians where the living is baptized as a "proxy" on behalf of someone who has already died. Such a ritual is practiced in modern times by a large religious sect. The context is clear that Paul is focusing on the *foolishness* of engaging in any rite or activity that pretends faith in a bodily resurrection which the pretender disbelieved. Second, there is *no documented* practice such as this among Christians of the first century. It would be unlikely that *only Paul* would mention, in *only this one place*, such a radical practice if it were settled doctrine. Third, the most natural understanding of Paul's question would be to associate it with the initial baptism of a Christian believer. A fundamental rule of hermeneutics is to always interpret a passage according to its most natural meaning. Baptism is the action of a believer which confirms his trust in the vicarious death of Christ and the vicarious resurrection of Christ to new life (see Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12-13). In faithfulness to Christ's command to be baptized, the believer receives the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; I Peter 3:21). If Christ is not raised, and there is no resurrection for those who believe in Christ, baptism as to form and purpose is meaningless. What is the point in being baptized (immersed) "in reference to being dead in sin" if there is no resurrection? Fourth, the Bible teaches that each man is responsible for his own faith and obedience to Christ (cf. Ezek. 18:1-24; 33:1-20; Luke 16:19-31; II Kings 14:6; Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:30; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that works of "proxy" may be done by the living for the dead (masses for the dead, prayers for the dead, etc.), but such teaching has no basis in scripture and is rejected by all evangelical Christendom. It is absurd to think that the spiritual, moral choices of one human being would be accepted by God as willingly made by another human being when the second person made no such choices. Fifth, there is only one mediator between God and man, and that

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mediator is Jesus Christ (I Tim. 2:5). Only *he* could accomplish a redemptive deed vicariously (for someone else). To think that this passage teaches the possibility of one human being baptized "by proxy" for another human being, dead or alive, is to fly in the face of the exclusive mediatorship of Jesus Christ. Sixth, to take verse 29 to refer to vicarious baptism being practiced at Corinth but stating that Paul would not have approved of it, is dodging the issue of all five propositions above. To think the practice was going on and that Paul would not renounce such a *crucial contradiction* of apostolic revelation is naive. Baptism by proxy strikes at the very heart of the gospel: ". . . *you* will die in *your* sins unless *you* believe that I am *he*" (John 8:24); ". . . but unless *you* repent *you* will all likewise perish . . ." (Luke 13:3, 4). Had proxy-baptism been a practice at Corinth, Paul would have devoted more than two questions to the issue! If proxy-baptism was widely practiced in the first century church, why is there total silence about it in the writings of the apostle John (John's Gospel, his epistles, and Revelation, were all written near the end of the first century, circa. 95-100 A.D.)?

Already in Paul's day, Christians were being arrested for sedition against the Roman empire and thrown into arenas to be slaughtered by wild beasts. The "fourth seal" opened in the Revelation written by the apostle John predicts the fact that great numbers of human beings would be killed "by wild beasts of the earth" in the struggle between Christ's church and the Roman empire (Rev. 6:7-8). Paul now says (15:30-32), "If there is no resurrection from death, why do I allow myself to be imperiled almost every hour of my life?" Some circumstances of life Paul could not control, of course, but those threats, persecutions and murderous attacks upon his person because he was a Christian missionary (cf. II Cor. 1:8-10; 4:11; 11:23-29) he could have foregone by simply renouncing Christ and the resurrection. Did Paul fight with beasts? This may be simply a figurative expression describing his struggles with "beastly" human beings when he was at Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:23-30). Had Paul literally fought with beasts in the Roman arena it is probable that he would have listed the experience in II Corinthians 11:23-29. It would not be unusual to speak of the enemies of God as "beasts." The prophet Daniel did; John the apostle did (Revelation). John even categorizes all idolatrous heathen who worshiped the Roman emperor as "those with the mark of the beast."

The only logical *alternative* to believing the bodily resurrection and practicing Biblical Christianity is *hedonism*. The religious person who

repudiates the historicity of Christ's bodily resurrection but advocates (and is even willing to endure suffering for) trying to practice the teachings of Jesus is a *fool*! He is either a gullible moron or a masochist! Paul is scrupulously honest in saying, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (15:32).

The bodily resurrection from death is *the absolutely crucial doctrine* of Christian faith. Christian theology, Christian evangelism, and Christian ethics are vain without it. Liberal "Christian" theology repudiates the bodily resurrection. As a result liberalism is insipid, powerless and useless (see Special Studies, "On Cloud Nine," and "The Existential/Neo-Orthodox Philosophy of History"). Frighteningly, even some "evangelical" Christianity (the existential-feelings-first kind) dismisses the critical necessity of the bodily resurrection in its proclamation and practice. One of the "new Christian songs" is a classic example. In a popular song by Andrae Crouch, entitled, *If Heaven Never Was Promised to Me*, these are the lyrics:

You may ask me why I serve the Lord,
Is it just for heaven's gain,
Or to walk those mighty streets of gold
and to hear the angels sing?
Is it just to drink from the fountain
That never shall run dry,
Or just to live forever and ever
In that sweet old by and by?

But if heaven never was promised to me,
Neither God's promise to live eternally,
It's been worth just having the Lord
in my life, Livin' in a world of darkness,
He brought me the light.

If there were never any streets of gold,
Neither a land where we'll never grow old;
It's been worth just having the Lord
in my life, Livin' in a world of darkness,
He brought me the light.

Dear reader, this may have a lovely tune, it may have "soul," it may have "the beat," and pragmatically, it may draw crowds of people to a religious concert, but its lyrics deny the very cardinal, focal, fundamental issue Paul addresses in I Corinthians 15! If heaven never was promised to *you*, neither God's promise to live eternally, then *you* are, of all men, most to be pitied if you are practicing the Christian gospel. You should eat and drink, for tomorrow you will die and perish, if there is no resurrection and no heaven. If my hope is "just having the Lord in my life" here, in this existence, I am a fool for thinking I walk in "light"!

If there is no bodily resurrection and heaven, we should be writing "Christian" songs with lyrics like these:

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a. Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and on his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that enoble his little days. . . .

—Bertrand Russell

b. Life has become in that total perspective which is philosophy, a fitful pullulation of human insects on the earth, a planetary eczema that may soon be cured; nothing is certain in it except defeat and death—a sleep from which, it seems, there is no awakening. . . .

—Will Durant

c. In spite of all my desperation to a brave looking optimism, I perceive that now the universe is bored with him (man), is turning a hard face to him, and I see him being carried less and less intelligently and more and more rapidly, suffering as every ill-adapted creature must suffer in gross and detail, along the stream of fate to degradation, suffering and death.

—H.G. Wells

Verses 33 and 34 confirm our comments on 15:12-19. The moral muscle of the gospel rests ultimately in the preaching of the historicity of the bodily resurrection. Paul quotes the Greek poet, Meander. The KJV translates it, “. . . evil communications corrupt good manners.” The RSV translates it, “. . . Bad company ruins good morals.” The Greek word *homiliai*, is the word from which the English words *homiletics* and *homily* come. The word is most often used to mean, “communication, conversation, discourse, talk.” Certainly in this context Paul is talking about some of the Corinthian Christians who were “saying that there is no resurrection.” Evil *preaching* and *teaching* corrupts good morals. And teaching that there is no bodily resurrection is *evil teaching*. The entire second epistle of Peter is a treatise on the fact that false teaching about the Lord Jesus and his deity is the source of the corruption of morality. When Paul wrote “good” morals, he did not use the most common Greek word for “good” which is *agathos*; he used the word *chresta*. *Chresta* means “good” in the sense of “that which is right because it produces good”—practical or useful goodness. The word *chresta* is used by Matthew

in recording Jesus' great invitation, ". . . for my yoke is *easy* (*chresta*, usefully-good)" (Matt. 11:30). Paul says in 15:33, evil, anti-resurrection, preaching is morally impractical. Liberalism is not only philosophically dishonest, it is ethically useless. It is worse than that, it is ethically corrupting! The fundamental cause of human immorality is the repudiation of the gospel facts—specifically, the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the essence of Paul's statement in 15:33-34. Anyone who aspires to search for, defend, and lead mankind to the *truth* must surrender to this! Philosophers, scientists, educators, preachers, lawyers, politicians and artists are under obligation to learn, believe and proclaim the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as the source of all morality and goodness. Paul called the philosophers at Athens to moral conversion and repentance by the power of the resurrection of Jesus (see Acts 17:30-31).

To sin, in light of the historicity of the resurrection, is insane. Essentially that is what Paul meant by his statement, "Come to your right mind, and sin no more." The Greek word Paul uses is *eknepsate*, is literally, "sober up." He is using it here to exhort the Corinthians to shake off the seductive moral stupor into which they have fallen by believing those who are saying there is no resurrection. False teaching about the resurrection has confounded their mental abilities like drunkenness confounds the brain. They are not thinking *right* (Gr. *dikaios*, rightly, correctly, truly). First, they are *philosophic schizoprenics*. They are not facing reality. They are repudiating the resurrection and at the same time pretending the Christian faith is valuable. Second, since the resurrection is true, as Paul has logically demonstrated, no matter how much they deny it they are going to face the judgment of God in the next life and to sin in light of this is insanity! Paul has appealed to incontrovertible evidence and irrefutable logic throughout this treatise on the resurrection. Now he *commands* (Gr. *eknepsate* is in the imperative mood) the Corinthians to start thinking as they should. Faulty thinking is a sin! Christians are not permitted the insanity of deliberately ignoring facts (see John 8:31-32; 8:43, 45, 46, 47; II Thess. 2:9-12; II Peter 3:5). Christians must constantly guard against the tendency to subvert clear, logical thinking by the selfish desire to follow feelings and urges of the flesh. Christians are continually urged by the scriptures to set their *minds* on God's word (Rom. 8:5-8; Col. 3:1-4; and Peter urges Christians to "gird up" or put-to-work their "minds" I Peter 1:13). To choose to be a Christian is to choose to apply one's mental processes in conformity to the

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sovereign word of God. To choose to be a Christian is to allow one's every thought to be brought into captivity to obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:3-4). To choose to be a Christian is to choose to see nothing any more from a human point of view but through the perspective of Christ's constraining love (II Cor. 5:14-21). There is only one hope for changing men's morals into that classified "good" (useful) by God, and that is to persuade them to believe the bodily resurrection.

"For shame to you I am speaking" says Paul (literally, in Greek). They were listening to "some" of those within the congregation who were saying there is no resurrection. Paul is apparently pointing to the anti-resurrectionists when he says, "some" are ignorant of God. Denial of the resurrection, especially by those posing to be Christians, is worse than a shame, it is a tragedy, a spiritual catastrophe!

SECTION 3

Its Heavenlyness (15:35-57)

35 But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" 36 You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 39 For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; 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 star differs from star in glory.

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 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 physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the

dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

⁵¹Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts 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?”

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

15:35-41 It Is Manageable: Questions about the mechanics of bodily resurrection have been raised throughout the history of mankind. Alleged absence of observed demonstration of such mechanics has been put forward repeatedly as proof that bodily resurrection is impossible. People want to know how human bodies that have died and returned to dust, have been consumed by fire, or have been eaten by animals or sea-life, which in turn have died and dissolved, may be raised from the dead. How can this be possible?

First, we must accept the revelation of God that he can manage it. “When God reveals, by special enlightenment through his Spirit, things which eye has not seen . . . (I Cor. 2:6-16), it is folly and irreverence to try to prove whether God told the truth. It is unreasonable to expect the scope of human experience and reason to provide the proof of things reaching so far beyond both reason and experience. . . . No method of science or of philosophy can prove some statements which are of central importance in the Bible. . . . These . . . must be accepted upon the authority or reliability of the one who says it is so. . . . The demand that all Bible statements must be discovered by scientific method, proved by rational processes, or confirmed by results in practice, before they can be regarded as authoritative or established truth, is simply a demand that God must not be greater

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than man and must not reveal anything man could not find out for himself with his own closely limited, earthbound senses." (Seth Wilson, in, "Reflections" *Christian Standard*, June 17, 1984).

Second, in the light of all the evidence of resurrection in the "natural" creation surrounding him, it is *foolish* for man to question the manageability of it. Paul uses the Greek word *aphron*, literally, "mindless, without sense." Those who cannot believe in a resurrection of the human body because it dissolves back into dust after death are *not very observant*. The miracle of resurrection occurs every time a seed falls into the ground, dissolves, and produces a new green plant. It is no accident that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ took place in the Spring season of the earth.

There are two important lessons about resurrection taught in nature. (1) Death is necessary. It is not an obstacle to resurrection. In fact, if there is no death, there will be no resurrection. That which does not die shall never be resurrected (John 12:24-26). Any farmer or gardener knows a seed must "die," rot and dissolve (and yet it is the seed which has the "life" in it) before the new and completely different form of life can be "raised up." (2) The new life from the dead seed is different in form, much more grand, and actually the fulfillment of the purpose of the dormant seed itself. Put a bean seed into the ground and what comes up is a green plant. The plant is from the seed, and inseparably linked to it, but much better and alive, producing. It is significant that Jesus, in the parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29), said that when a farmer plants a seed it produces a plant *of itself* (Gr. *automate*, automatically). The seed is planted in the earth and those two elements together *automate* the new life. If we had never seen the seed-to-earth-to-death-to-different-life process before, and someone said it happens, we would have our doubts. But since God has made it possible for us to see it over, and over, and over again, for us to say we do not believe a resurrection after death is manageable is foolish. We might as well say now, we do not believe a bean plant will grow from a bean seed because it is dead when it is put into the earth. Which of us fully understands the process of bean seed—to bean plant? If God has resurrected plants for centuries, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8)

Third, God is not locked into managing only one kind of body. God has created, as nature well attests, many different kinds of bodies. Scientists know there is such a difference they are able to

tell whether a single cell comes from a human, an animal, a bird, or a fish! How did Paul know this before modern science “discovered” it? Paul knew it directly from the Creator, by revelation. Furthermore, God is not limited to just four or four-million kinds of bodies. He “gives it a body as he has chosen, and to *each kind* of seed its own body.” There is a correspondence between what the body looks like and what the entity inside is like. If we trust God, we will be satisfied with what we look like!

Fourth, there are two major divisions of bodies; there are celestial (heavenly) bodies, and terrestrial (earthly) bodies. Celestial bodies have a different glory, a different purpose, than terrestrial ones. God managed to create and managed to sustain bodies as different in time, space, size and function as the human mind is able to imagine. Since Paul has already listed the terrestrial bodies (15:39), he now delineates the celestial as sun, moon and stars. And each of the celestial bodies are different! And how many stars are there? And God manages each of them! Assuredly, then, God can manage the resurrection of human bodies and even give each human a different body if he wishes!

It is breathtaking to contemplate. God makes bodies to fit the multitudinous differences in the entities inhabiting them! No two snowflakes are alike—no two entities are the same. So is the resurrection of the body. The differences that exist in human personalities here will exist forever in glory. Human personality is not wiped out by disaster and the grave. Human personality goes on in all its uniqueness, even if the earthly body goes back to dust. And, wonder of wonders, God has promised to give that unique human personality a new, different, body to *fit it*, different from all other bodies, but eternal. We *will* know one another in heaven!

We have seen this demonstrated in the Lord Jesus Christ himself, “the firstfruit” of the resurrection from the dead. He was in a different body after his resurrection; yet it was similar to the old body that had died and been buried. It retained some of its old essence while also having new attributes. In its new form it was not subject to the old limitations of time and space—not touched by exhaustion and pain. But he was the same pure, true, loving Jesus. And they recognized him. But bodily he could go through walls of a building, materialize and dematerialize.

15:42-50 It is Mandatory: The destiny of humankind is immortality. The transformation (or, recreation) of a body fitted for

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eternality is, therefore, mandatory. Once again, even the natural order of things tells us the body of this life is *perishable* (Gr. *phthora*, corruptible, decomposable). As the physical body ages, it slows down, weakens, deteriorates. Eventually, and inevitably, it must die and disintegrate. Just like the bean seed, it must rot and decay, *but* one day it will become a new plant, gloriously designed for its eternal existence, imperishable. It is "planted" in the earth in *dishonor* (Gr. *atimia*, valueless, worth nothing) because we have sinned and perverted its created glory. Whatever is good or to be desired in the body of this existence inevitably decays and becomes valueless. God has subjected it to futility and the bondage of decay (Rom. 8:19-23), he brings the whole creation to dishonor, for a purpose. He wants it to "groan" for redemption, (see Gen. 3:17-19; 5:29; Eccl. 1:2ff.). The physical body is "planted" in *weakness* (Gr. *astheneia*, without strength) and will be raised in *power* (Gr. *dunamei*, dynamically, "dynamite"). Men like to boast of the strength of their bodies, yet a tiny, almost invisible, microbe can devastate it and even kill it. The physical limitations of our present bodies are frustrating. But the body God raises after this one is planted will never be ravaged by disease, sickness, pain, time, space, or decomposition. It will suffer no weaknesses!

The human body of this existence is *physical* (Gr. *psuchikon*, natural, "soulish," or psychical). Ray C. Stedman calls it his "earth suit, or time suit."

But this "earth suit" is designed only for this life. It is not designed for anything else. It works fairly well in this life, but something could happen to this "earth suit" while I am talking or walking around. I could fall over and somebody would come along and say, "He's dead!" But it would not be so. I would not be dead. The "earth suit" would have died, but I would be as much alive as I have ever been, and already enjoying the new body, the "heaven suit," the "eternity suit." Paul's argument is, there is a body designed for the heavens, as well as one for the earth. What the apostle is saying throughout this whole chapter is that there is a definite link between the two.

(*Expository Studies in I Corinthians*, by Ray C. Stedman, pub. Word, p. 315)

Man has his "earth suit" from the *first* Adam (the word *Adam*, in Hebrew, means, "man"). Man may have his "heaven suit" from the *last* Adam, Jesus Christ, if man believes him and obeys him. There

are only two Adams; the first Adam and the last Adam, Jesus. The only other person beside Adam to become the *father* of a race is Jesus. Human beings are all sons of the first Adam by physical "soul-ish" procreation; human beings may be sons of the last Adam by spiritual regeneration. Adam, the first man, was made from the *dust* (Gr. *chiokos*, from *cheo*, lit. "to pour," hence, "loose earth or dust"). The first Adam became a living *soul* (Gr. *psuchen*, *psyche*), the last Adam became a *life-giving spirit* (Gr. *pneuma zoopoion*). What is the difference between soul-life and spirit-life? There must be a difference as Paul is thinking of it here. Soul-life is the animating life. Animals are said to have souls (see Gen. 1:20 where the Hebrew word *nephesh*, "soul" is used for animal life; and Gen. 2:7 where man became a live-soul, *nephesh*). Evidently, the difference between *soul* and *spirit* is that the soul is not an entity which exists apart from the body.

Stedman explains that when God breathed into Adam's body of clay the divine Spirit, the "joining together of spirit and body produced another phenomenon called the 'soul,' the personality." The soul animates the body and allows that body to function. When man sins, and all men sin, God's *Spirit* is quenched and he withdraws and that "soul" and body is condemned to eternal death. That is the destiny of all who have sinned *like the first Adam* (and all men have). But, all praise to God, the *last Adam*, Jesus Christ, *became*, by living a perfect, sinless life in the flesh (Rom. 8:1-8; Heb. 2:14-18, etc.) a *life-giving spirit*. Any human being who wants, may now be reborn a spiritual being, by faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. That is what Peter means in I Peter 1:3-9; what Paul means in II Corinthians 5:1-21. Without Christ's vicarious atonement, without his conquest of sin and death, in the flesh, without his resurrection as "first fruit" from the dead, there would be no resurrection for any man for there would be no *spiritual rebirth* possible. This passage casts great light upon all that is taught in the scriptures about the necessity of the new birth and indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit). Do not fail to notice that Paul calls Jesus the *last* (Gr. *eschatos*) Adam. There is no redeemer of mankind yet to come. Those who do not join the "race" fathered by Jesus Christ, by being born again, will not see eternal life. They will be resurrected to eternal death as offspring *only of the first Adam*.

In man's experience it is the *physical*, natural order (Gr. *psuchikon* "soul-ish" body) first, and the *spiritual* (Gr. *pneumatikon*, spiritual

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body) afterward (Gr. *epeita*). The destiny of soul will also be the destiny of body (I Thess. 5:23-24). If the soul of man has been sanctified by the recreation of God's Spirit within him, then the spirit and soul and body will be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The soul-spirit is separated from the body for a little while at the time of physical death. The soul-spirit returns to God who gave it and the body returns to the dust of the earth (Eccl. 12:7). But the nature of your soul-spirit determines what the nature of your resurrected body will be. The corruptible body is put aside in the grave, but it will be raised incorruptible if it has, in the course of this life, been the temporary residence of a Spirit that is incorruptible—the Spirit of Christ. If, therefore, you would like one day to bear the *image* (Gr. *eikona*, icon) of the heavenly body, you must possess the heavenly life now. What must be happening is the will of God being lived out in your life now, on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

All of the foregoing Paul has said to substantiate the divine fiat, “. . . Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven!” Beyond the grave, only that which is spiritual (heavenly) can enter heaven. What is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). All the trappings of this life, fame, money, physical beauty, self-righteousness, can never survive the grave. They rot along with the physical body. God does not want them—will not have them! He has something far better for those who trust him. Nothing in this world has any value, in itself, in the sight of God. Only as it enobles the spiritual in man is it to last beyond our funerals. Flesh and blood cannot do anything of value in the kingdom of God. This is what shocked Nicodemus when Jesus told him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, (or from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5). All those descended from the first Adam, who have sinned as he did (and all have), must start all over again. They must be *born* again. They must be born of water (baptism, an expression of our penitent, receiving, faith) and the Spirit (the grace of God shed abroad in our hearts), (John 3:5).

15:51-57 It is The Mark (Goal): The “mystery” (actually, the gospel is very often called the “mystery” Eph. 1:7-10; Col. 1:24-27) is *not* that “we shall not all sleep,” but that “we shall all be changed.” He goes ahead and explains, the “mystery” is the dead being raised “imperishable.” The Greek word used here for “changed” is not *metamorphou* (or, metamorphosis, transformation), but *allagesometha*

from *allasso*, meaning, "made to be *other* than it is." The change will be complete. The word is also used of the final change of the material creation (Heb. 1:12). This is the goal of God for all who believe in his Son, Jesus Christ.

This change, upon the bodily form of all humanity occurs at Christ's second coming—"at the last trumpet." Some will not "be asleep" (dead) at that time—some will still be living in this existence. It is to occur *in a moment* (Gr. *en atomo*, English, *atomic*, minute); in the "twinkling of an eye" (Gr. *en hripe*, in a glance) refers to the twinkle of light that occurs when you blink. It is one of the fastest speeds known to human observation. It will be instantaneous—it will be a miracle. God will be in a hurry to give his saints what Christ has earned for them and that for which they have "kept the faith."

The Greek word *dei*, beginning the sentence in verse 53, emphasizes that this change *must* occur. This mortal nature *must* put on immortality because "Death is swallowed up in victory!" Those who have believed that Christ has defeated death must not be imprisoned again in a state of corruption, held bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15). They must not have their abiding place any more in a body that is dying, afraid of death, and testifies of death. Death and Hades are to be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, forever banished from the believer's presence (Rev. 20:14). There is a sting to death. The very nature of our physical life (its nature that is doomed to destruction) makes death sting. Even in full view of Christ's victory over death, we still wince at it. We shudder at its appearance because it is an unknowable quotient. It is something over which we have no control—it is inexorable, inevitable. We fear it because of our sin in the light of God's absolute law. But the glad tidings, coming from the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ, are, *the power of sin is broken*. It no longer has dominion over us (Rom. 6:14; 8:2; 7:6; 5:17, 19). Thanks be to God who *is giving* (Gr. *didonti*, present tense verb, "continuing to give") us the victory over our corruptible "man" through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing more precious in the whole scheme of redemption than this promise that every day the Christian can lay hold afresh of the *grace* of Jesus Christ. Every day, though reminded of the weakness and mortality of the flesh by his faults and failures, the Christian can grasp by faith, again, the renewing and refreshing power of his immortality imputed to him by Christ. The victorious life is God's goal or mark for all men. Sin is the life of defeat. Sin is missing God's mark because the life

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of sin bears the image of the man of dust, doomed to corruption and eternal death.

SECTION 4

Its Helpfulness (15:58)

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

15:58a In Steadfastness: What a helpful, practical, glorious conclusion. Who said Christianity is impractical? Why else would anyone have any desire to be steadfast and immovable in this life? What other philosophy would produce stability in this life? Only the perspective based on the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ will do that! Paul uses the Greek words *hedraioi* and *ametakinetoï*; they are translated, "steadfast" and "immovable," respectively. *Hedraioi* means "seated, settled-in, fixed"; it is used to form one of our English suffixes e.g. "tetra*hedron*" denoting a crystal having a specific number of facets or surfaces. It also forms the second half of the English word "cathedral" which also means, "seated above." Christians have the power of the resurrection to help them live stable, fixed, settled lives. *Ametakinetoï* means "motionless, unexcitable, not given to passion." Part of the word, *kinetoï*, is the word from which the English words *kinetic*, *kinematics*, *kinescope* come. These English words all have to do with "motion." The alpha-privative and the prepositional-prefix, *ameta*, would cause the word to be translated, "absolutely, completely, immovable." The only way to be steadfast and immovable in this world of dissolution and mortality is to believe the resurrection! The resurrection is the key-stone of the arch supporting moral immovability in the storm of temptation.

15:58b In Service: The resurrection is the impetus for *abounding* in the *work* of the Lord. Preaching is work! Evangelism is work! Shepherding the flock is work! Teaching the saints is work! Learning God's Word is work! Loving is work! Being a "good Samaritan" is work! Believing is work (John 6:29); repenting is work (Rev. 2:5). To be a Christian a person must exhaust himself, his talents, his resources, his time, his soul and his body in the work of the Lord, (see Eph. 4:12; II Thess. 1:11; II Tim. 4:5; John 9:4). Let's face it,

there are times when the devil will tempt us to perceive doing the will of God is a *chore*, or worse, *repressive* and *futile*. Even Jesus cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But Jesus, in his moments of temptation to depression "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him out of death, and he was heard for his godly fear" (Heb. 5:7). Jesus did the work of God through the power of trusting in the resurrection!

15:58c In Security: There is nothing which will bring to the human soul the feeling of security and satisfaction as completely as the knowledge that one's *labor is not in vain!* So very much of everything written, painted, built, said, done, applauded, acquired, attained in this world is doomed to disappear. Only that which has been done in the name of Christ will be transferable (in different form) into the kingdom of God to come (heaven). Everything else has perished, is perishing, or shall perish. "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). The Christian whose hope is in the resurrection is the only person in this world who can find true, complete, abiding satisfaction and fulfillment. His labor is not in vain in the Lord. When he passes from this life to the next, his works follow with him (Rev. 14:13). If a man believes in God and his Son, his prayers and alms go up before God as a "memorial" (Acts 10:4). Every act of kindness in the name of Jesus and for his sake (even a cup of cold water) is remembered and will be rewarded by the Lord (Matt. 25:31-46). So, let us lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21) where they are eternally secure and fulfilling.

APPLICATIONS:

1. The gospel gives salvation only to those who "hold it fast"—God's offer of salvation is free, but conditioned on loyalty.
2. The *facts* of the gospel are important *first*—even *before* what we feel about it, or before its usefulness.
3. The *terms* in which the gospel is to be preached are objective, not subjective. It is history not autonomous human decisiveness.
4. Proof of the historicity of Christ's resurrection follows all the canons of legal, scientific evidence—can you name them?
5. There is significance to Paul's listing of himself as a witness to the bodily resurrection of Christ—what is it? Does it convince you? Would it convince others? A Jew?
6. What do you think of the moral honesty of those who deny the

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bodily resurrection of Christ and still want to practice Christianity? Would you?

7. What kind of life would you live if you did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead? Why?
8. Would you like to be baptized for someone who is dead? Would you be able to trust a God who allowed righteousness “by proxy”?
9. How often is the resurrection of Christ preached and taught at your congregation?
10. Do you see liberalism and modernism (now, it is neo-orthodoxy) as “corrupting good morals”?
11. Are you resigned to the fact, as nature teaches, that there is no new life unless death comes first? Has it been easy to be reconciled to the inevitability of death?
12. What kind of body do you think you will have in eternity?
13. Do you expect to recognize in eternity people you have known here? Why? How?
14. What of this life are you expecting to take with you to heaven?

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What was the “form” of the apostolic gospel proclamation?
2. Why does Paul say Christ died, was buried and arose, all *according to* the scriptures? What scriptures?
3. What evidence is offered by those who deny the resurrection of Christ? How do they explain the gospel accounts of it?
4. How many “enemies” of early Christianity became advocates of it? Why?
5. Why are we still in our sins if Christ has not been raised from the dead?
6. Why are men to be pitied if they have hoped in Christ only for this life?
7. Isn't there some value in practicing Christianity even if Christ was never raised from the dead?
8. Why is Christ “firstfruit” of the dead? Which dead?
9. What is “baptism for the dead”? Is it practiced today—by whom?
10. Why are people who are sinning *not* in their right minds?
11. Why do men say, “How are the dead raised”?
12. What is the answer?
13. What is the difference between the *first* Adam and the *last* Adam?
14. Why can't flesh and blood inherit the kingdom of God?
15. What difference does believing in the resurrection make in how we feel about Christian works?